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REFLECTIONS OF TEACHER-WRITERS ON WRITING AND TEACHING WRITING IN HIGH SCHOOL

BY

KAREN ANNE McGREGOR

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If the Angel
deigns to come
it will be because
you have convinced
her, not by tears but
by your humble resolve to be always
beginning: to be a
beginner.

- Rilke

DEDICATION

To my earth angels
Marita and Trevor
whose softness and simplicity
breathe life into this work.

Abstract

This study examines the writing and teaching processes of four high school teachers who are published writers. A semi-structured format was used to interview each teacher-writer, and the resulting transcripts provided the context for a second interview. The two teacher-writers currently teaching high school were observed for two days in their classrooms, at which time additional questions were formed and included in the second interview.

The interviews and observations reveal that the teachers exist as writers in their classrooms through writing with their students, talking to them as writers, and sharing their own writing. They provide conditions for writing which parallel those used by professional writers. Their students are engaged as writers by making choices, having flexible time structures, and writing in diverse genres and forms.

The teacher-writers recognize that writers all have different processes; consequently, they converse on an individual basis with their students, listening to and mentioning possibilities and problems in creating. Their conversations help students view themselves as writers and provide a model for peer conversation, self-assessment of writing, and audience awareness.

The results of this study encourage high school English language arts teachers to re-vision existing practice in the teaching of writing by becoming part of the writing community in their classroom and by providing students with environments conducive to growth as writers.

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Chapter One
One Researcher's Journey

> I am not a teacher -- only a fellow traveller of whom you asked the way. I pointed ahead -- ahead of myself as well as of you.
>
> George Bernard Shaw

My teaching story leaves a trail of memories, remembrances that cross, join, and intersect with my present paths as a researcher and future paths as a high school English language arts teacher. Interviewing teacher-writers about their own writing and teaching of writing has led me, as an educator, forward and back through labyrinths of past teaching experiences and the maze of possibilities that lie ahead. As I write this study, I remain in these journeys through time, weaving stories and voices, circling, questioning, embracing. Becoming wonderfully lost in the ambiguity of learning.

When I began my research, I refused to step into the labyrinth of uncertainty; I wanted answers, step-by-step guidance from the teacher-writers interviewed. Yet in talking to them about their writing and teaching, I gradually realized that their search was for truth, a sense of the whole, not quick-fix remedies. After interviewing two of the teacher-writers, I encountered a metaphor that reminded me of the remedy approach to teaching writing. While sharing breakfast with me, professor Marg Iveson noted that the muffins tasted like they came from a real person rather than a mix. Immediately it struck me that the metaphor of the pre-packaged mix or recipe was my subconscious intention when first beginning my research. I was determined to hand teachers a mix that would quickly assist them in helping children write. This thesis is not about a mix. It is not a recipe. It is about writing and teaching writing as a way of being, as a way of existing in the classroom. As such, it does not attempt to guide teachers into adopting one idea, one writing process, or one philosophy of teaching writing. It does, however,

take anyone who is willing along a multitude of paths which may lead to glimpses of roads ahead.

Unfolding the Study

As a first year teacher eight years ago, I was blessed with the voices of teacher-researchers like Atwell (1987), Kirby and Liner (1988), and Tchudi and Mitchell (1989). They advocated process approaches to writing which gave students opportunities to write in diverse genres and formats and validated the personal voice and preferences of students. Atwell (1987) in particular was pivotal in my thinking about student-writers' needs for time, ownership and response. Following her philosophy, I gave my junior high students opportunities to write in different forms and genres, using topics of their choice. I shared my writing with them and gave them opportunities to share their pieces with diverse audiences. After a few years, I felt confident that I was indeed helping students develop as writers; I knew the writing they were engaged in was "real" and of significance to themselves and others. When I accepted a position teaching high school English language arts, however, my confidence and trust in myself as a teacher and in my students as writers slowly waned. I convinced myself that the playful, experimental atmosphere of my junior high writing classes belonged only to junior high students; high school students needed "serious" practice in writing literary critical essays. They needed academic rigour and intellectual discipline. After all, they were part of the larger game of reality -- the world of university or college impatiently waiting with great expectations.

After a year and a half of teaching in a way I subconsciously knew to be false, I was ready to find a new career. My mind and body were magnets for depression; I could no longer be content teaching in ways neither my students nor I benefitted from. My path was filled with the rocks and debris of confusion, anger, resentment and sadness.

In the second semester of my second year of teaching high school, I began reading Cameron's *The Artist's Way* (1992), a book that encourages people to discover their capacity for creating. The book moved me to find ways in which my students' own writing processes and

creative selves could unfold. The more I read about creative processes in books such as *Life, Paint And Passion* (Cassou and Cubley, 1995), *Wild Mind* (Goldberg, 1990) and The *Unschooled Mind* (Gardner, 1991), the more I needed to explore such processes with individual student-writers.

I enrolled in a graduate course for teachers which allowed me to read further about teaching process in ways that assist individual students. But perhaps more importantly, I had the opportunity to share my own writing with fellow travellers; I had written very little after I began teaching high school, and I craved the opportunity to be nudged into such an experience. Renewing my commitment to write, I became interested in examining my own writing processes and was eager to read about the processes of published writers. I read books such as *The Paris Review Interviews* (Cowley, 1958), *Conversations On Writing Fiction* (Neubauer, 1994), and *Shoptalk* (Murray, 1990), which exposed me to the words of many authors. However, I wanted to connect the experiences of writers to the world of teaching, and so began reading texts like Murray's *A Writer Teaches Writing* (1968), which has been integral to the process movement in the past two decades. Fowler's *Gifts from the Tribe* (1989), a study focusing on the writing and teaching processes of published writers teaching at post-secondary institutions, was useful in that it helped confirm my desire to discover connections between writing and teaching writing, but it also left me wanting to know more about these same activities in secondary schools. Similarly, Hawryluk's doctoral thesis (1990) describes the composing processes of published imaginative writers, but most of these writers were not teachers, and those who were had not taught at the secondary level for several years. I assume that teaching a creative writing course in a post-secondary institution is different in certain respects from teaching writing in high school. Because of my own experiences teaching in a high school and my growing awareness of my role as a writer in the classroom, I needed to discover the perspectives of high school teacher-writers on writing and teaching writing.

Selecting writers who teach in high schools was also a decision made based on my concerns about the ways in which English language arts is taught in some senior high schools. As I observed high school classes, a number of constraints seemed to be inhibiting both student

writers and teachers of writing, including provincial exams, university entrance requirements, and a perceived need to "cover" the curriculum in semestered courses. As a result of some of these constraints, very little time was spent on writing of varying genres and forms or writing which did not focus on a critical response to literature. Indeed, these observations closely resembled my own experience teaching high school. I noted that the literary critical essay was, in some instances, the only genre students were writing, and often they were required to compose entire papers at home, with no class time to write drafts or dialogue about their piece in progress. Process writing and writing in numerous genres for diverse audiences seemed to me to be the experience of many elementary and junior high students, but not the experience of high school students.

Twenty-six years ago, Emig (1971), in her study of the composing processes of twelfth graders, had similar concerns about the limited writing experiences of secondary students. Students she interviewed composed almost exclusively in one genre and in one form -- the five paragraph essay -- worshipped by teachers across America. Students did very little self-sponsored writing or writing of a personal, reflective nature, and did not approach writing as a process; rather, they simply demanded a product in a short time frame. While there has been some movement in past decades to improve writing conditions for high school students, it is alarming to think that change has been resisted to such an extent. Even today, there are few progressive books which address the teaching of writing in high schools. Calkins (1994) believes that high school teachers who run writing workshops and who give students different writing experiences should be writing about their practice just as many elementary and junior high teachers have done. By having my participants discuss their approaches to teaching writing in high schools, I hope to encourage other teachers to re-visit and re-vision their own teaching of writing.

Choosing to limit my study to teachers who are published writers was not a quick or easy decision. Many writers do not publish a word yet are prolific and work tirelessly to improve their writing. (I am thinking here of Emily Dickinson's cookie jar full of poems discovered after her death, and how many of these poems were then published for the benefit

of the world.) Also, many teachers do indeed live in their classrooms as writers, although they may not be recognized as writers because they do not publish. Conversely, some published writers may not allow their own writing to influence their teaching in positive ways, or may be so consumed by their own writing that their effectiveness as teachers is minimal. However, some writers tell me that there is a significant difference between published and unpublished writers: published writers usually improve their work by revising extensively, by implementing editorial suggestions, and by polishing their content and style. Because it is difficult to publish writing in any genre, most published writers need to work consistently at their writing. They tend to see themselves as writers and to live their lives as writers rather than as people who write. Consequently, I chose to interview published writers; their attitudes and habits would likely have some effect on their teaching of writing.

When first developing ideas to define my research study, I examined Hawryluk's study (1990) of the writing processes of imaginative writers. I thought that my future participants could discuss their creative writing processes as well as methods they use to help students develop creative writing skills. However, I felt largely uncomfortable with the notion of creative or imaginative writing as separate from other types of writing. This discomfort was validated as I spoke to Rebecca Luce-Kapler, a writer and graduate student, who gently reminded me that all writing is creative, and that sometimes dividing and categorizing writing can become problematic. I later heard her words echoed in those of writer Nancy Mairs (1994):

> I do not distinguish between creative and critical writing because all writing is creative. There is a pen filled with black ink. There is a blank sheet of paper. Whatever the product -- poem, story, essay, letter to lover, technical report -- the problem is the same: the page is empty and will have to be filled. Out of nothing something. And all writing is critical, requiring the same sifting, selection, scrutiny, and judgement of the material at hand. The distinctions are not useful, except to people who want to engender an other with whom they can struggle and over whom they gain power. And because they

> are useful in that way, they are dangerous. I prefer not to dwell in their shade (p. 44-45).

Mairs' warning reminds me that post-secondary teachers sometimes label writing either critical or creative and place value judgements on the writing based on these labels. This may result in high school teachers emphasizing critical writing, glorifying it as the one form worthy of attention in the classroom.

My final decision was to have teacher-writers discuss their own writing and teaching processes across genre borders. At times, participants note distinctions in their writing processes across genres, but I felt pleased that such distinctions were voiced naturally through dialogue instead of artificially through restrictions. At many points in the interviews, the teacher-writers did in fact point out that some of their processes are similar across genres. Pulitzer prize winning writer Donald Murray (1990) agrees: "I do not feel... when I am working in any form that I am facing radically different questions of craft. The problems and solutions of writing with clarity and grace cross all genre boundaries" (preface, xv).

Selection of the Teacher-Writers

In selecting the teacher-writers for my study, I asked secondary language arts consultants, professors, graduate students and writers to recommend teachers who are published writers in one or more genres, and who presently teach or recently taught high school English language arts. A last guideline was that the teachers have a minimum of five years teaching experience at the high school level, included to ensure participants would be familiar with the curriculum, specific course requirements and external expectations such as departmental exams.

When receiving the names of potential participants, I decided to ask three teacher-writers who were most often recommended to participate in the study. After reading an A.T.A. article a teacher wrote about being a writer in his classroom of writers, I discovered another potential participant. He was then recommended by the consultant of the school board he works for.

All of the teachers readily agreed to participate in the study. While I did not limit my study based on gender ratios, I am pleased that the ratio of women to men is equal: two women, two men.

The Teacher-Writers

Garry Ryan, the first participant interviewed and observed, has been an English language arts teacher for nineteen years and presently teaches high school English and Creative Writing in the Personalized Learning Program at Lord Beaverbrook High School in Calgary. He has also taught junior high language arts and high school English in other public schools in Calgary. Garry has been active in preparing presentations for English Language Arts Council Conferences in Alberta and helped me conduct my own presentation at the annual conference this spring.

Garry has written three young adult novels and has had his poetry published in *Whetstone, blue buffalo, Alberta Poetry Yearbook*, and *Audio Pulp*. As well, he has published poems and articles in *Alberta English* and *The A.T.A Magazine*.

Janeen Werner-King is the coordinating teacher of English at Bishop Grandin Senior High School in Calgary. She has taught English language arts for twelve years, from grade six through first year university English courses. As well as having an education degree, she has an M.A. in English. In 1993, Janeen was nominated by her students for an Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists, and Geophysicists of Alberta (A.P.E.G.G.A.) Award for integrating math and science into language arts. She has arranged for writers, including Robert Hilles (winner of the Governor General's Award in Poetry, 1995) and Ken Rivard (local poet and fiction writer), to read and speak to senior high English teachers during District Professional Development Days. Janeen also regularly attends ELAC conferences where she has read her poetry and co-presented in a workshop with Marian Hood, another participant in my study.

Janeen has had poetry published in many magazines, journals and anthologies: *Queen's Quarterly, Ariel, NeWest Review, Stroll of Poets Anthology, Whetstone, Contemporary Verse 2, Studio Cafe Anthology,*

Dandelion, Orbis, Other Voices, Skylines, The Eclectic Muse, Secrets from the Orange Couch, Soundings, SansCrit, They also write, and *Alberta Poetry Yearbook.* She is also published in a chapbook, *Bending Light,* along with members of her writing group. Janeen has received several literary awards from *The Edmonton Journal* and a second place prize in the 1989 Galbraith Publishing Poetry Contest. She has had her poetry read on C.B.C's *Alberta Anthology* radio broadcast and has read at diverse venues and for special events such as the 1994 Calgary First Night Festival and the Calgary and Edmonton Stroll of Poets. Her academic publications can be found in *The Explicator* and *International Fiction Review* (*I.F.R.*).

Janeen's contribution to the writing community is also substantial, as she was a poetry editor for *Dandelion* magazine for two years, edited an episode of *Writing on the Wall* (Women's Television Network, 1/17/95), was a festival co-ordinator for the 1994 and 1995 Calgary Stroll of Poets, and was a judge for numerous poetry contests.

Glen Kirkland taught high school English language arts at various Edmonton schools over a period of sixteen years. He was the department head of English at Austin O'Brien High School for eight years, and was a Practicum Associate for the University of Alberta for two years. Over the past ten years, Glen has been the English language arts consultant for secondary schools in the Edmonton Catholic School District. He continues to teach high school English during the summer, and is actively involved in giving inservices and presentations at conferences and school professional development days. He has also been a judge for the annual Alberta English Writing Contest for students and gives writing workshops for both students and adults.

Glen has produced sixteen high school English textbooks. He has also written numerous short stories, poems, plays and novels. He was the co-author of the 1988 Edmonton Fringe Festival hit, "90 Minutes Live From Loon River," and wrote and acted in "A Matter of Censorship," a 1990 Fringe Festival Production. At present he has a play being published by Samuel French and Associates. As a poet, he frequently reads in the community as an active member of Spiritus, a trio of poets who read with jazz musicians. He has written two chapbooks with Spiritus and is currently working on a third. In 1996 Glen received

recognition as one of Edmonton's six favourite poets through the Stroll of Poets Society.

Marian Hood has taught English and Drama in Calgary for the past nineteen years. For many of these years, she taught high school, and is presently teaching at Ernest Morrow Junior High. Before completing her education degree, she earned a B.F.A. in drama at the University of Calgary and a Senior Diploma in Theatre Crafts and Design from the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts. She has worked as a lighting designer and a professional stage manager and has had a children's play produced by Storybook Theatre in Calgary. Marian was honoured this year with a Teaching Award of Excellence. She has been actively involved in presentations for conferences held by the Canadian Council for Teachers of English, the English Language Arts Council of Alberta, the Greater Edmonton Teachers' Convention, the Calgary Young Writer's Conference, and the Calgary City Teacher's Convention.

Marian's poetry has appeared in *Alberta Poetry Yearbook, They also write, SansCrit, Skylines, Alberta Learning Resources Journal, Journal of Educational Thought, Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, Egorag*, and the chapbook *Bending Light*. Her articles have appeared in *The A.T.A. Magazine, Digital Equipment Computer Uses Society, Elbow Valley Cycle Club*, and *Readers' Workshops: Bridging Literature and Literacy* (Irwin Publishing). Marian has given readings of her work to high school and elementary students as well as adult audiences, and she participated in Calgary's first Stroll of Poets in 1994. She was also one of the poetry editors of *blue buffalo* magazine for four years.

First Interviews

Prior to interviewing my first participant, I conducted a pilot interview with Kerry Helgrin, a junior and senior high English language arts teacher. Kerry has been writing for many years in various genres such as drama, short stories and academic papers. Although she is not a published writer, her experience as a teacher and writer, combined with her great enthusiasm for both activities, was invaluable in advancing my thinking about the purpose, clarity, organization and overall effectiveness of my interview questions. I used a semi-structured approach to

interviewing Kerry: I asked questions from a list but did not always ask them in order and omitted questions if responses were already given. I also made room for responses which were not directly related to the questions, and asked additional questions when necessary. While interviewing Kerry, I made several notes about questions that needed revising and she added her own suggestions for revising questions.

This first interview was two and a half hours in length, which concerned me because I could see that both of us were showing signs of fatigue after the first hour and a half. However, because three of the four teacher-writers live in Calgary and I live in Edmonton, I decided to complete the first interviews in one day rather than two; the participants willingly agreed to this. If I noticed that the teacher-writers or I were tiring during interviews, we took five- or ten-minute breaks which helped focus our thoughts.

After reading Fowler's thesis (1989) and *The Paris Review Interviews* (1958), I noted that the participant writers were given the questions ahead of time and appreciated having the opportunity to ponder potential responses. My own interview questions were mailed to each of the teacher-writers one to two weeks prior to each interview. They too appreciated the opportunity to consider possible responses. Two of them made a few point-form notes prior to their interview to serve as reminders of comments they wanted to make. While interviewing, I also made notes about questions which seemed to cause confusion or repetition and questions that I wanted to ask other participants in following interviews.

Initially I had thought about interviewing all of the teacher-writers consecutively prior to observing them and interviewing them a second time, but I wanted the opportunity to learn as much as possible from each of them before conversing with the next one. When interviewing and observing her participants, Sanford (1997) states, "Each conversation influenced my understanding of the last, and the direction of the next" (p. 37). Similarly, after each set of interviews, I constantly revised my thinking about teaching writing as well as the list of interview questions and approaches to interviewing. I was also able to formulate new questions for future participants based on comments made or observations recorded in a previous interview. In some cases, I had to e-mail

participants I interviewed first because I had discovered a need for a response to another participant's comments made later in the study.

After conducting the first interview with Garry, I began to realize that my concern about being the objective, silent interviewer devoid of facial expressions was actually detrimental in some ways; once I relaxed and began conversing with him and the other teacher-writers, they appeared to speak more freely and naturally too. The idea of conversation as opposed to a formal interview then led me to think about student-teacher relationships which could and probably should be built around genuine conversation rather than the teacher as questioner and student as respondent. As well, it was not until I began observing the first teacher-writer interviewed, Garry Ryan, that I realized why he answered many of the interview questions with "it depends:" he responds individually to students with diverse writing and learning processes. Later, I witnessed the other teacher-writers do the same. My observations led to a re-conceptualization of this thesis as demonstrating the teaching of writing as a way of being, an "it depends" way, rather than a recipe for successful teaching.

Observations

Since Garry and Janeen currently teach senior high school, I observed them for two days in their classrooms. My intent in doing this was to gather additional information and formulate new questions focused on their approach to the teaching of writing -- information and questions which might not be realized within an interview context. The observations did indeed assist me in this way; I was able to describe in detail the physical environment of the classrooms and certain writing assignments, and to ask questions about choices they made in teaching writing. Many of these questions, as well as questions I had from transcripts of the first interviews, provided the basis for final interviews conducted after observations. However, I also found that listening to the students interact with their teachers created another rich layer of contextual information. In fact, I sometimes regret not including student interviews and observations as part of this study, but perhaps such an ethnographic study could become the focus of my future research. I also

limited the period of observation due to more practical concerns: since Garry and Janeen live in Calgary, I needed to organize my trips in a time-efficient and cost-efficient manner.

Second Interviews

The final interview proved to be helpful in clarifying my own interpretations of responses in the first interview transcripts. The teacher-writers also had the opportunity to revise their initial interview responses at this time, but very few changes were made other than additional information they had forgot to mention or surface editing of punctuation, grammar and vernacular usage. I also found this interview served as an immediate in-context learning experience for both the teacher-writers I observed and myself in that we discussed and reflected on issues based on the two days of observation. Garry mentions, for instance, that if he were to teach a traditional high school course again, he would try to incorporate the feedback sessions and sharing of his own writing which was exclusively used with his creative writing group. In the first interview with Janeen, some of the questions she responded to centred on conferences. Two weeks later, I observed Janeen conferencing with students writing sonnets. When we began talking about conferences in the final interview after school hours, she mentioned that she had been thinking about how much more effective oral response to writing is than written response. We both decided to try incorporating more opportunities for oral response into our classrooms.

Learning through dialogue in second interviews was also apparent with Glen and Marian, the two teachers who were not observed. Marian noted that she had done more thinking about some of the topics discussed in the first interview and was prepared to share her thoughts with me. Glen similarly mentioned that he had found the first interviews beneficial in thinking about certain issues in the teaching of writing.

As well as final interview conversations, the three teacher-writers from Calgary extended some of these conversations through e-mail. Through this medium, I found both the teacher-writers and myself generally being more playful, tossing ideas and words around the screen. Humour pervaded much of the discussion, and I learned to think about

another dimension of teaching and writing that is important to a sense of being in the classroom and in the world -- the capacity for playfulness. Because the teacher-writers were all interviewed during the school year, I observed them to be fatigued and consumed by various obligations. But once they were able to dialogue through the written word, their tone was more lively. This is not surprising to me -- I too find myself losing spirit and the energy to play when my mind is overflowing with concerns, yet given the opportunity to write, I love to play with words and ideas which make the mind and heart spin a dance.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to interviewing the teacher-writers, I sent letters informing them of the purpose and methodology of the study, as well as their rights as participants, which included their right to revise any part of the final draft of the study pertaining directly or indirectly to them, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and their right to anonymity. After transcribing the second set of interviews, I asked the teacher-writers to send any revised sections back to me, but very few changes were made to any of the four transcripts. Since the teacher-writers were aware of the content of the transcripts, I asked them whether they would prefer to remain anonymous. None of the teacher writers were against being named in the study and were pleased with the decision of their school boards and administrators to grant them the right to be named.

While most education researchers use pseudonyms, since anonymity under all conditions is usually advised to protect participants, I felt strongly that these teachers, proud of their accomplishments as both published writers and as high school teachers, should have the right to be named. Jill McClay encounters a similar dilemma in her doctoral study, *Partners In Language Arts Teacher Education* (1992). She questions whether it is ethical not to name her teacher participants: "Making the McKernan staff invisible when they do not wish to be would be an appropriation of their identities that I believe to be unethical. Certainly, they are free to speak and write of their work, but that begs the questions of whether I am free to do so without proper acknowledgement of them" (p. 52). I too believe that the most ethical choice for me as a researcher

would be to grant my participants the right to refuse or accept anonymity. But as McClay (1992) maintains, the decision regarding anonymity can only be made after participants have read the final draft of the study.

Data Organization

After placing all first and second interview transcripts of the participants together, I began searching for a way to categorize the data and structure it. Early on in my study, I became increasingly aware of the need to represent not what the teacher-writers necessarily did in terms of a series of activities or a "bag of tricks," but how they existed as writers and human beings in the classroom. Consequently, my first major theme which serves as an all-encompasing general framework for the other chapters, which report and discuss data, is the notion of teaching writing as a way of being. This chapter portrays teachers as being immersed in and becoming members of writing communities within their own classrooms. The close relationship between the participants' roles as writer and teacher is evident through their philosophy of teaching writing and through their response to the writers in their classrooms.

Deciding on the structure of the rest of the thesis was much more challenging; I did not wish to contradict the teacher-writers' response to students with individual writing processes by using a time/sequence description of writing process like the one developed by Murray (1984). His categories include pre-writing, writing a draft, revising, editing and publishing. Although he emphasizes that these parts of process writing are recursive, many people who began teaching students about process simplified it by insisting that all students write in a linear, compartmentalized fashion. (Emig [1971] notes that teachers who don't write themselves tend to simplify writing processes.)

In his doctoral study of the composing processes of seven imaginative writers, Hawryluk (1990) attempts to avoid the lock-step process approach by refusing to identify too closely with familiar time-sequence descriptions of writing process; he uses "Prior to Writing," "Writing the First Draft," and "Revising" as descriptors, with the understanding that revising includes the processes of editing and

redrafting. This division of process writing is an improvement in that by grouping some processes together, the compartmentalization of the processes into little boxes, each separate and unrelated, is avoided. However, I believe that it remains problematic in that it still assumes a sequence which, in reality, is not followed by all writers. Many processes writers go through prior to writing a first draft are the same processes they use when having problems in the middle of a first draft. Similarly, revising content occurs, for some writers, after every few pages, every paragraph, even every sentence of a draft. Many experienced writers recommend that beginning writers not worry about revising during a first draft, yet some writers cannot produce writing in any other way. Because the teacher-writers in my study recognize the needs of different writers with different processes, I decided that grouping chapters according to one version of writing process would be largely inappropriate.

My solution to the organization of process teaching and writing was to create two chapters: one focusing on writing to discover and one focusing on responding to writing. In the writing to discover chapter, I included data about discovering ideas for writing through recording and incubation methods. I felt such a chapter was necessary because the teacher-writers all stress the importance of finding and shaping ideas and recognize ways to extract these ideas from the subconscious. Although most writing to discover takes place prior to first draft writing, it can occur at any time in a person's writing process. Marian, for instance, talks about the joy of revising being that she can discover new ways of saying something. Glen and Garry talk about discovering more about a character after writing a couple of chapters of a novel. As a result, I also include in this chapter the notion of recursive writing processes and how we can encourage students to experiment with this more natural way of producing a piece.

The other chapter focusing on process is "Responding to Writing." The more I thought about the compartmentalization and separation of writing processes, the more I wanted to create a chapter that represented a more holistic and natural approach to teaching writing and learning to write; consequently, I include revision, conversations, assessment, editing and publishing as processes that many writers go through when

responding to their writing. I also thought discussions of audience and voice are central to response since many writers, including the writers in this study, are often more aware of both audience and voice after writing a first draft or when publishing.

The last chapter based on interview data centres on the inhibiting factors of school, in particular the culture of high school, which sometimes interferes with student success in writing. Initially, I did not anticipate this topic to be the focal point of an entire chapter, but as the teacher-writers spoke of their own frustrations, in response to questions directly or indirectly related to the topic, I realized their concerns deserved to be noted apart from the occasional addition of a sentence or two in other chapters. However, none of the teacher-writers dwelled in hopelessness or negativity; none of them accepted the victim status. Instead, they talked about some of the ways they resist constraints by creating the best possible writing environment for students. Their story of resistance concludes this chapter.

Interpretation of Data

As I began writing the four chapters that record and reflect upon the perceptions of the teacher-writers, I became acutely aware of my role as an interpreter of information. I questioned whether I had summarized responses accurately and used them in the appropriate context. I was also cautious when imposing another layer of interpretation on the participants' words, created when adding other writers' and teacher-researchers' voices which affirmed or contradicted the participants' views. One way in which I attempted to deal with such problems was to use a relatively large number of direct quotations rather than summarizing most of the participants' words. I also asked participants to read through a final draft of the study to ensure their voices were represented as accurately as possible. Where direct quotations are used, participants had the opportunity to revise and edit their own words to better represent intended meaning.

Representation of Voices

The questions of equal representation of voices concerned me as I struggled to find a balance between my own narratives and interpretations of data and the narratives and perspectives of the teacher-writers. I knew that as a teacher-writer, I needed to voice some of my own beliefs and tell some of my own stories of teaching and writing. I could not disappear and pretend to be the "objective" researcher suppressing passion and delight, concern and sorrow, opinions and values. Mairs' (1994) experience parallels my own personal transformation: "I have lost, or at least I have tried to lose, the desire that underlay my early, academic writing -- the desire to establish myself as an authoritative impersonal consciousness capable of generally valid insights drawn with the humanistic equivalent of scientific objectivity" (p. 49). However, while I acknowledged that research is inevitably consciously and subconsciously about the researcher, I wanted the teacher-writers' voices to be heard and not drowned out by my own voice and the voices of other professional writers and published educators. Despite the many informative books about writing process and teaching writing available at my fingertips, I know that what the teacher-writers in my study say is equally important to the wisdom of revered experts. One of my sub-headings, "A Community of Writers," encourages me to reflect on the notion of revealing a community of voices within the text -- voices which each have a unique, significant role to play; voices which, when given space, sing with passion and intellect; voices which often harmonize and, at times, are discordant, yet always complement one another as they provide the reader with multiple perspectives on the teaching of writing. So while it is important to be aware of the theories and practice of "the experts," I do make a conscious effort not to minimize the individual and group voice of the teacher-writers at the expense of well-known teacher-researchers. I also use italics when expressing my own thoughts and feelings about particular issues; this technique helps maintain the integrity of the teacher-writers' opinions while simultaneously giving my own beliefs and experience necessary space.

Over the past three months, I have, quite by accident, formed a writing group with two other people, Betty-Anne Schlender and Kathy Sanford, who are also interested in sharing their writing and thoughts about teaching, researching, and the importance of autobiographical expression. Each time we meet, I think about the natural community of learners we have created, in which our voices are allowed to be separate and distinct, yet somehow our narratives, theories, and personal joys and sorrows are inextricably linked. In this weaving of voices, we have gained both individual identity and group identity. Although we delight in and share books and articles related to our topics of discussion, we don't rely on the voice of "the expert" to validate our thoughts, our feelings, our stories of family, motherhood, teaching and researching.

In revealing a community of voices, I felt joy as participants' oral voices leaped and danced across the page, yet their writing selves were conspicuously absent. When I asked each of the teacher-writers if they would be interested in submitting a piece to accompany the themes of writing or teaching writing, two of the participants, Glen and Marian, immediately noted that they had written poems which would be suitable. Garry sent an excerpt of his novel, *Crows*, and explained how it was indirectly related to the teaching of writing, and Janeen provided a poem which eloquently displays a reverence for and a wonder of language development. Because pieces are used in the context of a particular topic in the study, I asked participants to provide a brief interpretation to ensure that I would not misrepresent their intentions. As well, they were also given the opportunity to revise any interpretation placed on their piece when reading a polished draft of the thesis.

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Janeen describes her vision of writing process as a journey containing a "labyrinth of paths." Writers need to find their own way through the labyrinth by trying out different paths, by experimenting, by giving themselves permission to travel paths which may not always lead to desirable places. This metaphor not only confirmed the new vision of what my study would look like, but it also helped me understand myself

as a neophyte researcher; there are as many choices in researching the teaching of writing as there are choices in responding to one's own writing, and I needed to recognize that and allow myself to wander in the labyrinth in order to learn and grow. Consequently, my vision of the organization, structure and content of my thesis has shifted throughout my journey, and as I near the end of it, I am glad that I, like many writers, gave myself permission to live amongst ambiguity, to trust that "real" learning happens when you are lost on the foreign and uncertain paths of growth.

Chapter Two
Teaching Writing as a Way of Being

Be really whole
And all things will come to you.
Lao-Tzu

Prior to interviewing the four teacher-writers, I assumed that their role as published writers would influence the way they taught in clear and measurable ways. Indeed, there is no doubt that their lives as writers influence their values and actions within the classroom, but I was surprised to discover that their roles as teacher and writer are intertwined to such a degree that they themselves are often not sure if or to what extent their being writers affects the way they teach. Marian reminds me that writing is a state of being, and therefore cannot be entirely separated from teaching: "I don't think being a writer is something that you turn on and off at will. I think it's a way of looking at the world, a way of viewing yourself in a larger context." As I dialogued with all of the teacher-writers, I became more and more aware that their teaching too is a way of being, a way of existing in the world. Marian notes that her teaching is "not something that can be taken and given to someone else." She admits teachers can "take all this armour" with them, but they eventually must "get rid of it because it doesn't do any good." She believes that the armour of individual lesson plans or activities may be helpful to some extent and may make educators feel more secure in teaching students to write, but if students are to develop as writers, they need to be treated as writers.

Education researcher and professor of philosophy Maxine Greene (1995) notes that "To see things big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their own integrity and particularity instead" (p. 10). The teacher-writers in this study "see big" by inviting students to live in and out of the classroom as writers, by creating space for a community of writers to share and celebrate their writing. Greene notes that the power of seeing big

includes "the possibility of looking at things as if they could be otherwise" (p. 16). I believe the data in this study speaks to this possibility and encourages reform.

Little Yellow Marigold

I woke up today
and rushed to your side
to see if I had killed you.

A Miracle, really,
you being alive.
In my eagerness to make you grow most
accidentally saturated your roots
Buy This they said
Root Booster, Bloom Booster
only 9.99 only for today only
Reduced
Reduced
Concentrated Formula

I read, I concentrate...
it flows deliciously swirling round and round
mimicking the sun in water
it sinks
out of sight
I am hypnotized
Fail to remember the formula
this can't be enough I think
Panic tips the bottle
again and again
I sprint
watering can at your side at last
at last I saturate you
fill you
with goodness

Today the sun shines on your little
wilted body
I stand poised
Bloom Booster in hand
Instructions in words too small to see
too small
I hesitate
slowly remove
the shadow of my body
bent over yours
waiting

As writers, the four teachers believe in the power of language and in the necessity of sharing that power with others. As Lucy Calkins (1994) attests, non-writers who teach English language arts are not fully aware of this power and consequently "see little" by relying on "the armour":

> Because I had not, at the time, experienced the power of writing in my own life, I didn't yet understand that there is a world of difference between "motivating writing" and helping people become deeply and personally involved in their own writing. And so I spent most of my time conjuring up motivating activities, all based on the assumption that my students would write only if I jump-started them. Now I believe that this is a devastating assumption for a teacher of literacy to hold. We cannot teach writing well unless we trust that there are real, human reasons to write (p. 12).

The teacher-writers in this study trust in writing because they know first-hand what writing can do for them and share this with their students.

The four teacher-writers express concern that students see themselves as writers. They do not do this by merely telling students, "Think of yourselves as writers," but rather by existing as writers in the

classroom, by role modelling the world of the writer, by talking to **writers** in the classroom, not to students who write. As a result, their students develop the attitudes, skills and processes of many professional writers.

Atwell, in her book *In the Middle* (1987), draws us into her classroom by proposing that her students enjoy reading and writing and are highly literate because they are given opportunities to read and write in a flexible, safe environment, using processes that anyone outside of schools might use. Marian mentions *In the Middle* as being pivotal in shaping her own classroom environment because Atwell "treats reading and writing as real activities, important activities in and of themselves." In keeping with this vision of realness, Atwell maintains that all writers need ownership, response and time, three conditions which most published writers thrive on. All of the teacher-writers in this study mention these elements as integral to a successful writing program; one of the elements of ownership they emphasize is giving writers choice or latitude in decision-making.

Student Choice

In responding to interview questions, the teacher-writers note that the methods they use to write are not necessarily the methods their students choose to use. Garry says, "There are all sorts of ways to write," and Glen stresses that there are "different needs in different writers." In fact, an "it depends" response was most often given when I asked how they facilitated the development of processes such as revision, editing, or the generating of ideas. They all firmly believe in illustrating what works for them as writers and what works for other writers, insisting that students experiment with these various processes; however, after using a certain process once, their students are free to adopt it or another in the next piece of writing. In this way, the teacher-writers help students develop a variety of strategies to conquer problems and to write with confidence and skill.

Three of the four writers also use models to demonstrate processes or particular stylistic or structural techniques. Again, the students are required to try out the technique, but are not enslaved by it if, in future

pieces, they find other techniques that are more successful. When Garry asks students to evaluate whether a technique is working or not in a particular piece of writing, he tells students, "If it doesn't work, do something about it." He goes on to say that students are "always in control of the writing more than I am. It's their writing, so how can I be in control of it? I don't think it's something I can control anyways, so why bother trying."

Garry brings up an interesting point by noting that we cannot control student writing. Too often, though, this is precisely what teachers attempt to do because they believe that showing students their way or the way of the textbook gives neophyte writers something to grasp onto: a secure, reliable answer. Often when teachers don't write, they fail to recognize the many processes and techniques available that will help students become better writers. Even if they are aware, the idea of students having choices may frighten them, because with choice comes a loss of control. Published writers need some choice in order to grow as writers and discover what works for them. Students too need these opportunities. I am only beginning to discover the wealth of opportunity available to me as a writer -- how much better off our students would be if we shared this wealth with them!

As a high school student, I vividly recall being asked to plan essay writing by beginning with a formal outline, roman numerals and all. While I wasn't particularly bothered by the expectation at the time and found that writing outlines actually helped solidify my thinking to some extent, I remember classmates who were frustrated with the entire process. Unfortunately, I inflicted the same misery on my own students when I began teaching because I felt that, as a student, I had done a reasonably commendable job of writing essays and therefore the outline must be the answer to student organizational problems. After all, the frustrated students I attended classes with were probably just not trying hard enough to "get it right."

It wasn't until I discovered students were creating outlines for assignments after final products were submitted that I began re-visioning planning processes. I also began taking graduate courses in the evenings which required lengthy papers containing complex ideas synthesized with

the ideas of professionals in the field; this experience forced me to shed the formal outline, which had become inadequate for my personal needs as an academic. I also began to delight in writing thoughts without resorting to a plan and without ever having captured such thoughts in my mind or on paper previously. My development as a writer began to affect my teaching of writing as I could no longer allow myself or students to believe the old lies we had heard year after year -- well for some, the "rules" of writing weren't lies. But I wanted to show my students the possibilities of the many different ways to dance with their writing, rather than drag it about like a pair of worn workboots.

When the teacher-writers respond to student work orally or in writing, they are also careful, as Atwell (1987) is, to leave the ownership of the writing with students. Janeen speaks of her experience with a creative writing teacher who encouraged students to develop a voice and style strikingly similar to his own. A former editor of *Dandelion* magazine, she is aware of making editing choices which respect the integrity of the piece and its author. She often asks poets to consider revising a line or two, but would never ask them to alter chunks of content or the voice in the piece, since the poem would no longer belong to them; instead, it would contain parts of her own voice and values as a writer. Similarly, when responding to her students' work, Janeen says, "I don't want to rewrite a paper that is my paper. I have to look at what the students' ideas are and, as an editor, give them comments that may or may not make that the best paper it can be, but it's true to their ideas and their voice." Marian also encourages conversations with students which allow space for genuine contemplation of their writing, where a student and teacher converse about possible writing decisions, rather than having a one-sided conference in which the student extracts the answer from the expert.

All of the participants maintain that students need to have space to design their own topics in a given genre or to alter assigned topics to suit their personal needs and preferences. The idea of ownership again influences these teachers to create such space for student writers, as Glen notes:

> If one gives an assignment which is set, one should leave room for negotiation on the part of the students who have a particular bent that they want to follow, and I think that they should be able to shift an assignment, a topic, slightly in whatever direction they feel is best. So it's important that the writing be theirs and be something that they feel a conviction about doing. And giving some latitude for negotiation is important.

Glen's note about conviction in writing is also mentioned by the other three participants as crucial in the development of writing skills. Garry Ryan reminded me of the significance of James Britton's (1970) dummy run analogy: in World War Two Britton was required to drop bombs in a channel and return to his home base rather than proceeding with an actual mission. Interpreting this analogy, Garry states,

> I think he was trying to say that so much of the writing we get kids to do doesn't mean anything to them. It's just sort of a circle route and there's no destination for them. So I think we have to tap into what's important to the kids and then work from there, because what's important to them gets down on paper.

Social psychologist Teresa Amabile (1983) examines factors which enhance and inhibit intrinsic motivation to create. Her findings suggest that choice, no matter how small, can be a significant factor in enhancing intrinsic motivation.

Advantages of Limits

Despite the advantages of choice, all of the participants maintain that limits can be advantageous for certain students at particular points in their development as writers. Marian is aware of trying to accommodate writers who thrive on choice, but she also works closely with those writers who require more direction and tend to be more dependent: "I try to give them enough structure so that they don't feel like they've been

thrown into the water and they can't swim, but I also try not to box them in if I can help it." This balancing of needs again demonstrates that although teachers would like students to be able to make their own decisions, they need to assist them in gradually doing so. As Marian says, teachers need to accept what students are capable of doing at any given moment and work with them, rather than frighten them by insisting they attempt something they are not emotionally or intellectually prepared for. Janeen also notes that students tend to be far more successful with their writing when some limits are imposed, such as following a model to develop a writing technique. She believes that models tend to free her student-writers to focus on their ideas rather than having to worry about the form or structure, and observes them to feel more safe when working with a model because "it's not the blank page intimidating them."

Musician Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990) writes about the power of limits on artists, limits which release their creativity and sense of play. He notes, for instance, that when artists must work within the constraints of a certain form, they often discover creative surprises and, paradoxically, a sense of freedom. He cites poet Wendell Berry, who writes, "The mind that is not baffled is not employed. The impeded stream is the one that sings" (p. 84). But despite debates regarding the degree of choice students need in order to develop as writers, the teacher-writers in my study usually grant some choice and impose some limits. Choice of topic is common amongst all of them, whereas choice of form and genre is more rare. By allowing students choice of topic, teachers encourage ownership over their creations.

One limit all of the teacher-writers impose in their classes is that students, at certain points, write in a particular genre. Because they can work with students individually and in large groups to determine some of the conventions and traditions of the genre, there is an intensity created in genre studies that is difficult to achieve otherwise. When students and teachers dialogue about common successes and problems within their pieces they have a better understanding of the genre. When students are immersed in a genre study, teachers are better able to help scaffold writing processes in order to guide them through the completion of a piece. Glen warns that writers can become frustrated if teachers simply tell them to compose a piece such as a story. He illustrates how he helps

students develop strong, detailed characters prior to beginning to write a first draft of a story. Because Glen writes stories and novels, he understands that they often begin with an image of a character. Also, he recognizes the importance of knowing characters thoroughly in order to record their thoughts, actions, dialogue and mannerisms. Hodgins (1993) recommends resisting first draft writing in stories or novels until sufficient information has been collected, such as bits of description, dialogue and notes on ideas. By making such processes visible to young writers, teachers can scaffold not only the students' creation of the individual story but also help develop thinking processes required to write in the same or similar forms again.

Writing Workshop Elements

In maintaining a balance between choice and limits, the teacher writers use a version of Nancie Atwell's (1987) writing workshop. In Atwell's version of workshop, students generate their own topics and genres and use pre-determined blocks of time to work on their writing. Each student may be working through different processes at the same time but is able to converse with peers or the teacher at any time during these set blocks. Marian uses two of six blocks for a writing workshop in her present junior high classroom and implemented the same format when teaching high school. Her format differs from Atwell's in that within a six or eight week block of time, often the length of a reporting period, she asks students to submit three or four completed pieces of writing, usually a minimum of one personal and one critical piece along with a piece of their choice. To allow students more time when needed, she accepts works in progress for the purpose of summative evaluation at the end of a term or semester. When not engaged in group mini-lessons, her students choose to use their time in ways that work best for them on any particular day. Marian uses a version of Atwell's "status of the class" form in order to see what each student has accomplished from week to week. Added to this form are shorthand notes about things she needs to address in conversations with students, such as elements of style or content concerns noted after reading drafts of submitted work.

Janeen also has students submit a folder of writing after several weeks, implementing a writing workshop structure throughout this time period. Once a week, her students use a class block to work on first drafts. After six weeks, at which time they have six first drafts, the workshop block is used for peer revising and editing of three of the drafts of their choice. Janeen's students write a minimum of three polished pieces: one critical, one personal and one creative/imaginative piece. Both Janeen and Marian also give students the option of combining a personal and creative piece if they wish to work on a larger, more complex work. Within genre studies, both teacher-writers ask students to write several first drafts and then choose one to develop and include in the writing folder.

Garry has a multi-aged group of students taking English courses at all levels in a personalized learning program he developed with his teaching partner Mary Anne Sutherland. Their students complete three written assignments in approximately nine weeks, selecting from a variety of genres and forms in a course requirement list and working at their own pace during class blocks. Garry also has small groups of creative writing students who work on their writing while the students on personalized learning programs are working individually or with a partner. These creative writing students are in a very similar environment to those in Atwell's class in that they choose to develop a piece in any genre using a topic of their choice. When giving mini-lessons, Garry does ask students to try a certain technique or genre, but does not demand that students use it in a polished piece if they discover another technique, topic or genre is more effective for their purposes or particular piece. Every few weeks students also write under sweatshop conditions, where they are given a topic or asked to think of a topic and they write non-stop without revising or editing for a limited time period, usually one class block. Using these drafts as well as others they've worked on under the usual conditions, students choose to polish two or three pieces within a nine week period. Like Marian and Janeen, Garry allows students to negotiate the required number of submissions. For example, they can submit a couple of chapters of a novel instead of two pieces such as a poem and a personal essay.

Glen notes that he has had students submit writing folders using conditions similar to those of Janeen and Garry. However, if he were to teach high school courses again, he would implement a writing workshop for at least one third of the class time, and use the other class blocks to work on critical thinking and reading skills. He notes that he would balance the free choice writing with some demand writing in the form of critical essays, since students need to develop the capacity to write under both conditions, particularly if they are to go on to post-secondary schooling. The other teachers also mentioned teaching students to write on demand as being a necessity in the high school English language arts curriculum, again, mainly due to university or college expectations and departmental exams.

Flexible Time

While the teacher-writers in this study impose limits in their writing workshops or in setting up expectations for the completion of writing folders, the choices Atwell (1987) notes as essential to growing student writers still exist in their classrooms. One of these choices is being able to work on different processes at their own pace on a piece they select. This freedom, again, is a natural condition for most writers and allows them much needed space to address particular needs under particular conditions. Garry talks about some students participating in sweatshop writing who need to immediately return to the writing of another piece they are engaged in because they feel a certain level of success or flow in the writing. Glen maintains that there are "different needs for different writers," reminding me that individual students need response at different stages in their writing; consequently, arranging one segment of class time for teachers and peers to respond tends to destroy the immediacy of response needed. When professional writers need an editor or someone to rehearse ideas with, they are not limited to Thursday morning from 8:30 to 9:00. So too, student writers need flexible time frames with which to work.

Within a flexible time structure, student writers are also able to incubate ideas or let ideas percolate. The teacher-writers all note that if they are writing a first draft and are blocked from continuing for one

reason or another, they leave the piece for a few hours, days or in one case, even months. They also mention having to "wait" for an idea or a focal point, particularly when writing or preparing to write a first draft of a poem. These waiting periods are crucial to many professional writers, as seen in *The Paris Review Interviews* (1958) and in the interviews Fowler (1989) and Hawryluk (1990) conducted with Western Canadian writers. Students must be made aware of incubation processes, as Marian says. Too often, she maintains, they are not privy to "the secrets" of writing, the processes writers go through to complete a piece. In her youth, Marian herself was one of these students: "I didn't take creative writing courses in school because I knew I couldn't do that. I thought it just sort of came out of the head and appeared in a textbook that way." In order for her own students to undergo a demystification process, Marian reveals "the secrets" in context, as individual students need to become aware of them.

Risks in Writing

Using workshop approaches allows writers subject to summative assessment the freedom to revise and polish pieces they feel most positive about. Janeen and Marian note that high school students are often concerned that every piece they produce be flawless, mainly because they are used to all of their writing being graded and have not been encouraged to see it developmentally. These students are not willing to take risks and experiment with their writing processes, with styles and techniques, ways of organizing, and other aspects of writing. As a result, their growth as writers is minimal. Marian notes that because high school students have been in school longer than any other students, they are more likely to be victims of negative evaluation and assessment of every piece they produce, and are consequently very hesitant to take risks even under the conditions of a writing workshop. Marian's reluctant writers in junior high are similar to such high school students as they have a fear or hatred of writing, often because they've been expected to "get it right" and are condemned with negative comments and poor grades for failing to "get it right." Her workshop conditions combined with her

demystification of writing processes helps her students slowly begin to risk and grow as writers. She tells her students,

> It's normal to hate some of the stuff you write, but don't throw it out. It's normal to get frustrated with it. It's normal to have to do it three or four times. It's normal to have people not understand part of it. And what that does, if you can do it properly, is to say to the kids, "It's okay to make mistakes. You don't have to get it right the first time."

Janeen says her students begin to view writing as a gradual process of growth when she writes with them and shows them her first drafts. Not only do they understand that polished writing does not appear magically, but they also begin to give themselves permission to compose pieces which may or may not develop into polished products. Stephen Nachmanovitch, in his book *Free Play* (1990), states his belief in the value of practice, illustrating great artists who are able to practice without demanding a masterpiece each time they begin to create. These artists know that with practice comes a maturity and growth that would not be possible if it were not for their freedom to create the "good" and the "bad." Many artists accept both freely. Ray Bradbury (1990) says writers need to know that they will learn from good work, but will learn even more from bad work. He advises beginning writers that, "Work done and behind you is a lesson to be studied. There is no failure unless one stops" (p. 133). Janeen also believes in the value of practice; she sets herself writing exercises and maintains that whether or not a piece resulting from an exercise has any potential, at least she has spent the time writing. In workshop environments, students have the opportunity to exist as artists, as "real" writers taking risks and accepting, as Janeen says, the journey of writing with both its hills and its valleys.

To encourage risk-taking and a natural writing environment, all of the teacher-writers give students the opportunity to abandon a piece of writing or rewrite it. In their own writing, Janeen and Marian mention having to abandon poems which were not progressing to their satisfaction; they transfer this experience into classroom practice and discussions with students. Marian and Garry encourage students to create

a new piece if an existing piece in progress simply is not working. Glen tries to help students revise or re-write a piece from a different perspective if they have particular problems, but gives them the ultimate decision as to whether or not to abandon it. He notes that while he is aware of students who would benefit from re-writing after summative assessment, he also recognizes that there are students who would be better off beginning a new composition. For example, a student who might be struggling just to compose a paragraph may not benefit from rewriting a piece composed over a two week time period. Again, knowing writers as individuals helps teachers make suggestions which can further student confidence, pleasure, and ultimate growth in writing.

Independent Writers

One result of the freedom of choice granted in writing workshops or in the productions of writing folders is that students become better at making their own decisions and relying less on teachers. Three of the four teacher-writers discussed their concern that students be independent decision-makers by the time they graduate from high school. While they encourage students to ask peers for editing assistance, they hope that the young writers will have the confidence and skill to make choices which enhance the quality of their writing. Janeen notes that an unexpected result of her sitting down to write quietly with her students is that they are forced during that time period to struggle through their own problems and not rely constantly on her availability to confer. Marian says that her junior high students are "almost entirely" re-active, but that she is working to show them that the decisions they are making are "the kinds of decisions that make a difference." When students are given the opportunity to "make a difference," they begin to think of themselves as writers and believe in themselves as writers capable of independent creation. Murray (1968) maintains that "When the teacher can stop teaching, can stand back and see his students teaching themselves, then he has succeeded. His ambition should be to teach as little as possible, and eventually not to teach at all. He is most successful when the students have become their own teachers" (p. 133). The participants in this study all teach in ways that encourage students to become their own teachers.

Physical Writing Environments

Just as professional writers have some choice in determining the environment in which they write, so too do the students of the teacher-writers. Garry's classroom is large enough to provide different work areas for students who are at various stages in their writing. Those who need to write in a quiet space go into his office attached to his classroom. Students who want to use computers to compose can do so, or have the option of writing by hand at large tables. Tables make conversing easy and also are conducive to working on projects. Comfortable chairs are available for people engaged in silent reading, and an attached classroom, often empty, provides groups of creative writing students an opportunity to share their pieces and respond without disturbing others in the adjoining classroom. Glen talks about visiting an ideal classroom which has most of the elements Garry's room has, with the added feature of one computer for every student. Marian also talks about the usefulness of having computers available for students to compose on.

In a previous school she taught at, Marian's students, if they were not at the point at which silent writing would be beneficial, had the opportunity to conference in a small room attached to her classroom. She says that in her present situation, she does not have the luxury of this environment, and so has to set aside certain times for quiet work and other times in which students can either converse or choose to work alone. Atwell (1987), Rief (1992) and Bomer (1995) all designate places in their classrooms as conference corners. Bomer notes, "By establishing two or three spots in the classroom as conference areas, I can give students a chance to talk to each other without having constant talking at their desks" (p. 32). He has a corner opposite the conference area designated as a space for writers who do not wish to be interrupted. Teachers need to be resourceful with available classroom space in order that student-writers have cognitive and affective space to create. As Janeen says, teachers do not need a great deal of material things to create an effective writing environment; the only necessary element is a structure that gives students an opportunity to make choices which allow them to exist as writers.

Diversity in Genre and Form

Through writing workshops and writing folders, students most often write in a variety of genres and are consequently more likely to experience the pleasures of writing. However, many high school students lose the capacity for joyful creating when they are limited to one genre or one format -- namely the literary critical essay. Three of the four writers express great concern over the emphasis of this particular writing at the expense of other forms. Glen notes,

> Philosophically, some teachers can justify a year in which no creative writing happens, and by creative writing I use an old-fashioned term, but no writing of poetry and short story, and I'm speaking mostly of high school here rather than of junior high. It's possible to go a year without assigning the writing of a story and teaching students how to write a fresh and vivid story. It's possible to go through a poetry unit and spend time on terminology and no time on the writing of poetry. It's possible to spend the year being a reader of writing, rather than a writer of writing. And I think that's sad, because there's so much joy to be discovered, so much interiority to be explored, that it's sad if students do not have that opportunity to discover about themselves both what they want to know of themselves and their capacity to voice things honestly and openly.

Glen recently taught a group of poets to extend invitations to their community to write poetry and assist interested people in beginning to write in this genre. This experience reaffirmed his commitment to the need for poetic expression and writing in fictional worlds, as he listened to the poets debrief after leading community workshops: "The first thing that was said was that there are a lot of people out there who have lots to say and nobody to listen, and that poetry offered a vehicle for them to say something internal, honest, that was part of them, and to put it forward to an audience in a small group situation." Similarly, Janeen contemplates the importance of writing for the general community outside of school --

writing which does not resemble the experience of many high school students: "If I look at the kinds of writing people will do in the rest of their lives, most people will not be writing critical essays. They will be doing personal writing or functional writing, or communication with their friends and family. That will be the purpose of their writing. And so somehow we have to make room for that."

A few weeks ago I was visiting with a colleague, reminiscing about relationships developed with former students. I described the writing of one former student who wrote a stylistically and emotionally mature, moving piece about her attachment to the place of her ancestors and the influence her surviving relatives in the area have had on her. The teacher responded with surprise, saying that he never knew the student had the potential to write so well because her critical essay writing skills were horrid. I cried inside for this tender-hearted girl who I remember as being a "real" writer: she had the ability to reflect on incidents and view the world with a questioning, observant, yet always compassionate outlook. I wonder now if she will write after graduating, if she will express herself through the written word and find the joy inherent in this expression. I wonder how many students I have "lost" in my own determination to prepare students for university. What about preparing students for a life well-rounded and well-lived? I remember Marg Iveson telling me of an elementary teacher who fondly told her, "I want my kids to leave here with some memories for life." I would like my students to leave high school with memories that, if not immediately, will one day nudge them to pick up a pen and write a letter to a friend, a poem for their lover, or an editorial voicing beliefs with passion and conviction. I want students to feel the power of the written word and use language to feel alive, to avoid the culture of numbness we so easily fall prey to.

The teacher-writers talked about expressive writing as being vital for all students. Glen uses the example of hieroglyphics on cave walls to demonstrate the natural human desire to communicate. Garry talks about expressive writing as necessary to record and reflect on feelings: "The only way we can get things down and think about how we feel is through writing. I don't think talking works well, at least it doesn't work for me.

It works for some people. The permanence of how you feel is lost when you talk. The permanence of how you feel is preserved when you write." Similarly, Glen recalls an experience that reminds him of the need for expressive writing. He and another teacher helped a group of people compose their own poems, and as members of the group shared their poetry, most burst into tears for "they had written about what they felt deepest and what hurt most." Glen believes that, in such instances, writing helps externalize feelings, which in turn helps people cope with them.

Glen also talks about expressive writing as a medium for getting to know self. He is currently writing a book about finding spirituality in a non-spiritual world, and in it he encourages journal writing as a method to discover more about one's self. He tells of his own father who kept a journal for fifty-four years: "One of the things he had a commitment to was to find the best possible way to live his life by reading philosophers and thinkers and prophets like Nietzsche and Buddha. He wrote many quotations in his journals and then reflected on these quotations." Glen invites readers in his own book to reflect on the quotations selected and contemplated by his father.

The writing of Glen's father reminds me of the great opportunity we teachers have of creating a culture of reflectiveness, a society of thinkers, people who feel. When we encourage students to become critical thinkers in English language arts, we need to "see big" by expanding this goal to include more than just the ability to read a piece of literature carefully, analyzing and evaluating it. Critical thinkers are also people who develop the capacity to contemplate their self and how that self might function in relationship to the rest of the world. As a teacher, I want to help my students "see big" and, similar to Glen's father, reflect on how they might live life fully and contribute to humanity in some way. No one wants to live life without leaving at least one fingerprint, no matter how small, yet many people seem to disappear, to blend into the pattern of a non-thinking, non-feeling culture.

Janeen and Marian also keep a journal, but use it mostly for the purpose of recording ideas for their writing. While none of the teacher-

writers require their students to write personal journals, they do give them opportunities to engage in expressive and introspective writing in diverse forms and genres. Glen believes that giving students a balance of various kinds of writing allows them to "learn what writing can do for them: that writing can be satisfying, that it can help you get to know yourself, that it can help you communicate, that it can be a way of putting things outside yourself that you want to objectify a little bit." When students experience the value of writing in diverse forms, Glen's vision for future student writers may be a reality: "I'd like writers to write because they need to write and want to write, rather than because they have to write. We talk about life-long readers. I'd like life-long writers to happen as well."

In the following poem, Glen writes about the different stages he went through in which he came to an understanding of the world; one of these stages, the writing of poetry, left him permanently changed:

> I found meaning that touched my interior self profoundly through the writing of poetry. If intelligence is fire, ashes (or poems) are the remaining thoughts that I am constantly casting into the winds, leaving a trail over time.... The writing of poetry is a way to be fiercely alive, a way to leave a trail of your consciousness blazing on the dark trails of time.

Words Like Ashes

Once upon a time
a world drew me in
and I became light and sound
and endlessness...

Once upon a time
a family drew me in
and I became
their touches, their actions,
and their voices...

Once upon a time
stories drew me in
and I read in rhythms
of light and dark,
rehearsing the journey
out from self
and back --
home,
not home,
and home again...

Once upon a time
religion drew me in
and I learned questions and answers
that turned my body into dust,
my soul into a milk bottle,
and my existence into journey
from darkness to radiance...

Then
once upon a time
poetry drew me in
and I found that words like flints
could strike sparks from my soul.

Now, the book of me
ablaze with imagery,
my words like ashes
rise into the wind,
drift high
into the darkness,
and fade away
one by one
by once
upon a time.

- Glen Kirkland (Copyright remains with the author.)

A Community of Writers

As I bring my writing to share with Kathy and Betty-Anne, I wonder what gives me a sense of belonging, a feeling of comfort in sharing my writing and responding to the writing of others. Perhaps when I realized the commitment each of us had made to not only develop a piece of writing every couple weeks but to share that writing and discuss it, I knew that I would not be alone in revealing a part of myself, in risking raw feeling and thought. The knowledge that we "are in this together" was comforting, and allowed me to quickly let go of fears that my writing wasn't good enough, wasn't worthy of being shared. One of my favourite writers, Margaret Laurence, often referred to other Canadian writers as "the tribe." While I have always intellectually comprehended the metaphor, it is only after joining a group of writers myself that I understand it on an affective level as well. There is something about the power of a group writing together and sharing human experience that invites the creation of a family, a tribe, a community.

All of the teacher-writers in this study write with their students, usually when the whole class is immersed in individual composing rather than conversing with others. They mention the need for students not merely to be told that their teacher writes, but that they actually see him or her compose in class. They note that students respect them for being involved in the act of composing. Marian purposely sits with her students to write in order to encourage community and to help them observe some of her own composing processes:

> I want them to see me as a writer as they are writers. I want them to see me doing whatever it is that I do when I write, because sometimes I'll sort of smack my head or mumble or whatever, and I want them to be able to see that. And also I think it's a signal when I come down and I sit with them. I mean "come down" figuratively rather than literally -- that "I am in it with you." I'm not always removing myself to

> that space in the classroom, to the teacher's desk, which is kind of private space. I'm in here with you doing it.

The teacher-writers talked about sharing their writing with students at different stages in their writing, from a quick freewrite to a polished piece. Janeen and Garry even show students how their own writing progresses from first draft to final draft. When Garry invited me to talk to his creative writing students about their impressions of him sharing his own writing with them, I was immediately amazed by the positive response, the sense of conviction and emotion in student voices. They all made comments focusing on their relationship with Garry as a writer. They told me they can identify with him because he shares his writing and because he is experiencing the same difficulties and successes they are. They also talked about their awareness of the risk he takes in sharing his writing, and how that risk influences them to share their writing as well. Interestingly, Garry later pointed out to me that these same students began to be more open towards me when I shared my own writing during a feedback session. This led me to think about the naturalness of developing relationships when both teachers and students are writers and develop community as writers by composing together and responding to each other's work. Marian validates this thought as she speaks about her belief in relationships: "I believe that relationships are important in that relationships are established around the work. I don't think that you go out to have a relationship and do all these gropy-feely things. But if you are working on something with the students, I think that's where the trust grows. I think that's where the relationship grows."

Although all the teachers believe in the importance of sharing their writing with students, both Glen and Marian warn that some students may feel a sense of despair when looking at their teacher's writing because they think they could never write that well. Garry and Janeen, however, did not feel this to be the case with their own students. Janeen notes that she tends to focus on writing techniques when showing students her own writing or a model by another writer; this emphasis encourages students to place their energy into developing one aspect of their writing instead of negatively judging it as a whole and giving up on it. Garry asks students for advice on his writing, and then incorporates their suggestions

and shows them the results of the revision. This helps students not only to see his writing as a developing, on-going process instead of a series of fixed masterpieces, but also encourages the creation of community amongst writers who help each other and share their victories. He tells of one incident when he was frustrated with a scene in his novel in progress, *Crows*, but his students were able to come up with the perfect image needed to complete the scene. He concludes by telling me, "When you open yourself to that kind of impact and tell them how it worked after they give you this idea, that shows that you're taking their advice, that you value their advice, and that they are in the same position." The following excerpt from *Crows* is connected to the writing of Garry's students. He says, "We wrote as members of a community who shared their writing as it developed and progressed," and notes that talking to his students helped him "present the two points of view portrayed in this scene."

[In this excerpt from *Crows*, Phil and his daughter, Anna, are about to meet Rose at a hockey game. Anna isn't aware of some of the things her father and Rose (an aboriginal grandmother) have been up to. This scene leads into the novel's climax.]

The Zamboni driver began his first circuit where the boards and ice met. In the corners it rubbed up against the boards and a ripple in the glass followed alongside the man and his machine as it chugged snow into a hopper.

Phil and Anna sat side by side at the top of the stands, backs against the cinder brick wall. A shrouded heater in the shape of a long pipe radiated its heat down onto their faces. Phil lifted his chin and closed his eyes, luxuriating in the heat.

"Crazy kids."

Phil opened his eyes and turned in the direction of the voice.

"Almost missed the game." Rose was climbing the steps. Her brown knitted jacket was zipped to the chin and a pair of crows flew across her breasts. The odd thing was it appeared as if she had three breasts and one was trying to climb out from under her jacket.

Phil watched the third breast as it squirmed up along the zipper and worked its way to Rose's chin. "Andrea's workin' tonight. I'm lookin' after the kids. My sister was late. Couldn't get her truck started." She was smiling at them.

"Rose?" Anna asked and pointed to her chest.

"Oh." A beak, a pair of eyes and a black feathered head appeared under Rose's chin. "Too cold to leave him outside." She looked over her shoulder to see if anyone was watching then pulled her zipper down. She squeezed past Anna and Phil. He caught the scent of wool and wood smoke as she passed. "Kaw!" Rose coughed to cover the bird's call.

Anna giggled.

The flesh on Rose's face looked like it had been caught in the glare of brake lights. "He wouldn't stay home and there was no time to argue." She shoved the crow's head down between her breasts till only his beak was visible. "He likes hockey," she explained. She looked at Phil's face and then Anna's, reading both of their eyes. "What's up?"

Phil and Anna looked at each other. "Nothing," they replied in unison.

"Right," shrugging her shoulders with disbelief, Rose looked at the ice.

Phil was quiet for a moment and was thinking about all that had happened in the past month or so. What's the sense of hiding from Rose? he thought. The words spilled out and formed themselves. "I've been having dreams. Anna's Mom is coming to the game. The Hawks plan to take the body to our kids. There's something wrong with my nephew."

Anna leaned forward, eyes wide and white, staring open-mouthed at her father.

"Nice teeth," Rose said to Anna and smiled.

Anna closed her mouth.

"There's no sense in hiding from Rose," Phil explained to his daughter.

"He's right," Rose added.

"Kaw," Elijah Harper added and all three coughed to cover his cry.

"First things first," Rose cocked her head to the side, looked at the ceiling and squinted with her left eye. "Gotta protect the kids." She looked at Phil. "We gonna pull them outta the game?"

"No," Anna interrupted. "Kris is counting on Mom seeing him play. He thinks..."

"If he scores a goal it'll all be okay." Rose finished Anna's sentence for her.

"How did you know?" Anna asked.

"I know."

"She does," Phil nodded for emphasis.

"You gonna help?" Rose asked Phil.

"What?"

"Take care of the kids."

"What do I do?"

"You'll know when the time comes."

"I'm not sure," Phil felt tension gathering, growing, gnawing in his belly.

"You knew which bingo card to choose for my Andrea."

"What bingo card?" Anna asked.

"Your Dad knew the winner," Rose explained.

"What winner?" Anna's chest heaved as she took in air.

Phil watched her, wondering if she'd hyperventilate when he answered, "The $75,000 winner."

"You won $75,000!" Anna squealed and smacked Phil on the back.

"No," and Rose paused, "he picked the winner for my Andrea."

Phil watched Elijah Harper's head as it followed the Zamboni laying down its wet fresh blue coat of water over ice.

Anna sat back and her head thunked the cinder brick. "Ouch."

"My Andrea was depressed and your Dad changed that."

"$75,000," Anna repeated.

"What about the dream?" Rose asked.

"Dream?" Anna leaned forward again and held her forehead with the palm of her right hand.

"When I was a kid, I fell through ice," Phil explained as he rubbed Anna's back.

"Ohhhh," Anna moaned.

"Asleep or awake?" Rose asked.

"Both," he admitted.

"What else?"

"In the last few dreams there's been someone under the ice with me," Phil studied his hand remembering the other's fingers around his wrist.

"Who?" Rose pushed Elijah back inside her jacket.

"Kaw!" he complained. All three humans coughed.

"I can't see his face," Phil admitted.

"His?"

Phil sensed the significance of her question, "My Mother said 'Watch out for the boy' just before she died.'"

Rose nodded.

"So?" Anna added.

"When my Mother said 'watch out' it meant something was about to happen."

"You're kidding, right?" Anna took another deep breath. Phil rubbed her back with his palm.

"She wasn't kidding when she told me to stay off the ice. And she was the one who pulled me out. She just knew I needed help," Phil said to his daughter and looked at Rose. Elijah cocked his head to the side and eyed Phil.

"Phil's got it too," Rose added. "Some things he just knows, like he knew the winning bingo card."

"This is too much," Anna moaned. "When did you help her win?"

"The night you got that." Phil pointed at her eye and its greens and yellows.

Anna rubbed her eye and chewed her bottom lip.

"Worried about Kris, then?" Rose went right to the heart of his fear.

"Yes, and..." Phil wasn't quite sure what to say about his other fears.

Rose waited. Anna waited. Elijah turned his head and looked at Phil as if to say, "Well?"

"When I asked how my nephew was, his father went berserk," Phil began.

"How come?" Rose asked and then looked over the expanse of ice now completely clothed in a fresh, slick coat.

Phil heard the whack of black-taped sticks smacking the ice. Skate blades etched the slick surface. Phil shivered. "I don't know."

- Garry Ryan
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Because the teachers interviewed work hard to develop their writing, they treat student-writers with respect and know how vulnerable and fragile they are when sharing their writing with teachers and peers. In fact, all of the teacher-writers were adamant that teachers need to write in order to really understand the emotional and psychological implications of teacher response to writing -- writing that is intricately woven into the very fabric of their being. Marian describes her own observations of some teachers:

> Some of them, not many of them, but some of them, really seem to delight in being brutal to kids. I'm glad they're in the minority, but I really see that.... They're just not careful enough. They're not respectful enough of the gift that they're being offered, because to write something for somebody is a gift.

In recognizing writing as a gift, Marian talks about the necessity for positive response to student writing. The other three writers also stressed the impact positive comments have on individual students as well as the community of writers in their classroom. In fact, Garry insists on placing only positive comments on student work; he feels students are vulnerable when writing and knows that they benefit more from knowing what they can do rather than what they are not able to do at a certain point in time. Murray (1984) encourages teacher response which points out specific student strengths. He too believes that writing develops when writers work on what they are already good at and make it better. In his essay "Teaching the Other Self" (1982) Murray notes that "The successful writer does not so much correct error as discover what is working and extend that element in the writing. The writer looks for the voice, the order, the relationship of information that is working well, and

concentrates on making the entire piece of writing have the effectiveness of the successful fragment" (p. 120). Glen believes that although he can see movement toward more positive response, by and large teachers tend to be more deficiency-centred than proficiency-centred. He tells of an incident in which his students were asked to record their strengths and weaknesses on opposite sides of a five by seven card, but many of them struggled to list any strengths. They were all able to produce a list of weaknesses.

When recalling school experiences that influenced their own writing and teaching of writing, all of the teacher-writers mention memories of being praised or recognized as children or adults for their writing. I too have vivid memories of teachers who gave me written or verbal encouragement. Janeen and Glen recall high school teachers who gave them the support and encouragement they needed, even if, as they mentioned, the writing was not particularly profound or insightful. Glen says, "I felt a sense of capacity that the power of writing could actually affect people who felt positively toward the writer as a result of the writing." This comment invites the possibility of positive commentary influencing students' perceptions of themselves as writers. Marian talks about students who gradually, after listening to her point out specifically what some of their strengths are in any given piece, begin to develop the confidence in their ability to create, and with this confidence, writerly conversations develop. She later points out that many of her at-risk students are no longer afraid to write. I believe this statement to be a testimony to the power of positive response and what it can do for both individuals and the larger community of writers. The teacher-writers note that their response to student writing is both a conscious and subconscious model for peer response. An atmosphere of acceptance and trust develops over time.

Knowing that the practice of placing words on paper is a courageous act that makes writers vulnerable to possible hurt, influences, in part, the teacher-writers conscious attempts to build community based on trust and respect for the work of others. When discussing the impact of critics' reviews of her writing, Mairs (1994) says, "I'll never like disapproval, no matter how fairly couched... and the praise counts for so little in relation to even a whisper of a blame (p. 140). All of the

teacher-writers mention being injured at one time or another through hurtful, destructive responses to their own writing by fellow colleagues or their professors and teachers. Janeen remembers one professor who responded to a piece she submitted by writing, "This is an almost excellent paper," instead of talking to her about the positive qualities of the writing and any possible suggestions for improvement. Glen recalls being shocked by a reader's entirely negative remarks to a script he wrote; the response made him put the piece away for some time, but he then decided that he knew it was a fine piece and has since had it published in the United States. Such experiences with harsh feedback have made the teacher-writers sensitive not only to their own response to student-writers, but also to the conditions of peer response in their own classroom.

As well as modelling response, two of the teachers, Glen and Garry, always allow students to choose the person or people they want to get a response from. Garry gives several reasons for this decision in the form of a question: "How does a new writer sit through all that information unless you have a person you trust, a person who's got valid criticism, a person you're willing to listen to and a person who's also understanding of the fact that you've put a lot of time into this, and a compassionate person?" Marian also allows students to choose their own partners to confer with, but if she notes that they are not responding productively, she asks them to find another partner for awhile or chooses one for them. Janeen creates home groups which meet throughout the semester on a regular basis to respond to each other's writing. Because these groups are together for an extended period of time, the members trust one another and feel comfortable sharing their writing. However, Janeen believes that sometimes groups need to be adjusted to ensure that all members have opportunities to talk and feel free to contribute to discussions: "There has to be a sense of community in a group, that we're all going to work toward this goal together, and I think that's really important."

Two of the teacher-writers note that when students are given the opportunity to share their writing and know the strengths of others, they seek out those writers who could help them most. These teachers also praise different writers by exemplifying particular writing strengths and

by encouraging other students to talk to them and learn from their strengths. This reminds me again of the many opportunities for learning which can occur amongst a community of writers -- learning that is not controlled or dispersed by the teacher.

After meeting with three of the four teacher-writers in their classrooms, it occured to me that the physical writing environments they create also encourage a sense of community amongst student-writers. Janeen often has students group desks to form tables for home groups to work together, while Marian and Garry both have tables in their classrooms. Marian and Glen enjoy having tables in their classrooms because conferencing and working together is made a little bit easier. Garry notes that he prefers tables to desks because "they encourage conversation and you've got some elbow room and desks are in rows." He goes on to add, "It seems you put things in rows and people start thinking in straight lines... I don't find that this is about speaking in straight lines."

In Garry's classroom, he has a few comfortable chairs, which he notes are important to kids who may sometimes perceive school to be a threatening place. Janeen had a couch and chairs in a previous school she taught at, and as her creative writing class used the furniture when sharing pieces, a whole different atmosphere developed. They were comfortable, not just mentally, but physically. I believe that physical environments can and do ease the mind, and if we are encouraging students to exist as writers, we need to be aware of the conditions that positively affect their ability to write.

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The teachers in this study live their lives as writers, rarely fragmenting their identity and practice as a writer from their identity and practice as teachers. They quietly show me that teaching writing as a way of being is about allowing students to exist as writers. It is about understanding students as writers. It is about participating in the classroom community of writers as a writer. No quick and easy recipes. No pre-packaged answers.

Chapter 3
Writing to Discover

How do I know what I think until I see what I say?

E.M. Forster

The page waits, pretending to be blank.

Margaret Atwood

The natural desire to express through writing is intricately connected with our desire as humans to discover, to seek, to come to know ourselves and the world. Because writing is closely linked to thought, we record ideas, values, beliefs, even bits of past events that we had never before thought of or recalled. Writers often comment that one of the great intrinsic motivations for creating is the delight in discovery, yet too often, students graduate from high school not having experienced this joy. Possibly, such students are rarely given the choice to develop their own topics and opinions, to explore their interior world. As a result, when they are asked to write about a topic which has personal meaning to them, they cannot do it, regardless of age. Sometimes they truly believe they have nothing to write about and search in vane for possible ideas. If an idea does arise, they may be uncomfortable using it after having been in environments which they perceived as unsafe. Finally, frustrated, they may decide that writing is a worthless activity and resist it entirely. Because of their own experiences with writing to discover, the teacher-writers in this study invite students to engage in similar experiences that are a natural part of many writing processes.

Memory and Experience

The teachers in this study encourage their students to look into their memory and daily experience, just as they do, in order to capture the joy of discovering thought on paper. Garry talks about his interest in writing developing as an adult, when his childhood experiences,

catalogued and stored in his brain, began to reveal themselves as he wrote. Reading the poetry of the other teacher-writers, I realized that (as they later confirmed), their memories too play a significant role in their writing. Camus says, "A man's work is nothing but the slow trek to rediscover, through the detours of his art, those two or three great and simple images in whose presence his heart first opened" (Murray, 1990, p. 81). Students have the capacity to find great meaning through memories by recording them and reflecting on their importance, in any form or genre. Marian asks her students to capture a person, place or emotion that stands out in their memory, and reminds them that their brains actually do a fair bit of the writing for them by filtering and then retaining significant memories. Glen asks students to recall a specific memory within a limited time frame, which helps them create a poem and recognize the power of creating strong images that impact both the reader and the writer emotionally and in an intellectually honest way.

The teacher-writers remind students that memory can also feed imaginative writing. Writer Eunice Scarffe told me that she believes all writing to be a combination of memory and imagination. When peppered with imagination, memory is often what the best fiction consists of.

I have been thinking about the importance of memory in my own writing and how, inevitably, the content of my poems, journal entries, and opinion pieces never strays far from thoughts of my life as a little girl, as a teenager, and as a adult woman. Just today I began furiously writing an article in praise of small northern towns, spurred by the recollection of a pompous man who, rushing past my mother and me, not saying hello, stated to his partner in no uncertain terms that he would never understand how anyone could raise their children in Faust, a town of two hundred, a town in which I spent most of my childhood days and teenage years. The fact that indignation invited my response has led me to believe that the relationship between memory and emotion is what causes me, in part, to continue composing.

Yesterday, while participating in a writing workshop for women, I was struck by the diverse emotions in the writing shared -- emotions inextricably linked to the memories each woman wrote about. We felt the sardonic tone in memories of a wedding, the anger in the description

of a family photo, the joy in recalling moments when we first discovered the world of reading. The people in my writing group also tell stories of their past containing raw, unadulterated emotion which demands a bodily response: goosebumps, a tingling sensation, tears. I want to give students more opportunities to discover their own raw feelings and genuine thoughts by encouraging them to gently extract and nudge memories onto the page.

The teacher-writers also encourage students to use recent experiences as sources for their topics; through the familiar, students are more likely to write with confidence without the added pressures of researching. I witnessed Janeen sharing one of her poems about a time when she bartered with a Mexican child, and Garry talked of his disturbing observations in Barbados which resulted in a suite of poems. Garry also uses painful experiences as a source for his writing, but he usually requires some time to pass before emotionally and intellectually dealing with them through writing. Glen talks about experiences in which he encounters or is told about unusual people who become the basis for fictional characters. One account in particular piqued my interest:

> My mother tells me a story every once in awhile about a woman who lives in my hometown and this woman claims she has never sinned, though she is sixty some years old. And I thought, "I wonder what makes a person believe that," and I started to fictionalize by creating experiences which led her to be the way she is." I don't know at all what the woman's experiences were, but she interested me enough for me to make up a story in which her secret is revealed and there's tragedy and so forth.

Glen's account reminds me that the people and events surrounding us every day can be a focal point for discovering a story that needs to be told. Too often, students believe they have nothing to write about, but if their experiences are seen to be valuable in that they are encouraged to write from their own surroundings and from their own ways of knowing, they will likely be more apt to reflect on daily occurences, people they

meet, and incidents they hear about. Wallace Stegner (1988) believes that "The way to gain experience is to live, but that does not mean one must go slumming for the exotic or outrageous or adventurous or sordid or even, unusual. Any experience, looked at steadily, is likely to be strange enough for fiction or poetry" (p. 23-24). The following poem, written by Janeen, illustrates how an everyday experience such as watching a baby grow and learn to talk can be viewed with wonder and freshness:

Genevieve Navigates Her Time

You come crying, poured out of God's
tea cup into a chaos of stars
a heart count
'til you coast along
the green river of calm and
navigate the night in a gravy boat
with only a teaspoon

You slide down the stem of
a giant yellow tulip of morning
into a town of checkerboard piazzas
story book towers and topiary
stairways reaching rooftops and later
the night sky
where the clockfaces
at the earth's four corners
wait for you
who looks into them
to find your first word
the first time
time words sail into the blue
bubbles carrying miniature northern lights inside
words fragile worlds orbiting
in a celestial marble game

- Janeen Werner-King

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Freewriting

In order to discover what they feel and think about a topic, many writers force themselves to write a first draft quickly, without turning back to re-read or revise. This method of writing is used by all of the teacher-writers and they also have students experiment with it. They refer to this type of composing as freewriting or sweatshop writing. Marian talks about writing a first draft quickly and then not looking at it again because the only purpose she uses it for is to discover what she wants to write about. She shares this technique with students who need to find out more about a topic they are interested in, but she also uses it with those she calls the "crushers and chuckers": students who get two words down, throw their paper out, and then repeat the process several times. These students often find writing to be a frustrating experience because they tend to be harsh critics of their own writing. Some published writers also have similar experiences. Cowley (1958) believes that "The professional writers who dread writing, as many do, are usually those whose critical sense is not only strong but unsleeping, so that it won't allow them to do even a first draft at top speed. They are in most cases the 'bleeders' who write one sentence at a time, and can't write it until the sentence before has been revised" (p. 18).

Janeen also notes that freewriting is helpful for her and her students because it blocks the internal censor: "If I turn my editor on, it stops me from writing.... I just get it down and then I play with it afterwards. And I think that's important when you're teaching kids -- to let them just get it down and then go back. It's not going to be perfect the first time." Natalie Goldberg (1990), a strong advocate of freewriting, builds her writing workshops around the technique, using support similar to Janeen's to justify its use:

> Most of the time when we write, we mix up the editor and the creator. Imagine your writing hand as the creator and the other hand as the editor. Now bring your hands together and lock your fingers. This is what happens when we write... If you keep your creator hand moving, the editor can't catch up with it and lock it. It gets to write out what it

> wants. "Keep your hand moving" strengthens the creator and gives little space for the editor to jump in (p. 2, 3).

The power of the censor telling us that our writing is not good enough encourages editing which is often unnecessary in the early stages of creating -- editing not only of how we say something but of what we say. Consequently, the ability to access the raw thought and emotion in the subconscious becomes increasing difficult. Janeen notes,

> One of the things I try to let kids do is trust their subconscious mind that taps in and makes those interesting connections or finds those bizzare ideas we have. Or sometimes they're horrible ideas or a horrible side of human nature with which we don't really want to deal. When we do something like a freewrite and we just let the ideas flow and we get them down quickly and we don't edit, sometimes those things come out. If we edit, we'd never find those things in the first place.

Goldberg (1990) also believes freewriting helps us face the uncomfortable, and encourages all writers to confront pain and fear at all times while composing: "If something scary comes up, go for it. That's where the energy is. Otherwise, you'll spend all your time writing around whatever makes you nervous. It will probably be abstract, bland writing because you're avoiding the truth" (p. 4). Arthur Miller would agree: "The best work that anybody ever writes is the work that is on the verge of embarrassing him, always" (Murray, 1990, p. 39).

I've been using freewrites more and more to get past my own internal censor, particularly when I want to compose fiction. A couple of weeks ago I was pondering the development of a character who might appear in a play that I'm writing. As I thought about some general attributes to begin sculpting this character, I decided to do some timed writing just to see if the ideas would flow better. I gave myself five minutes to quickly jot down a basic description of the mother, but as I rushed past my censor, ideas came so easily that I wrote for thirteen

minutes before checking to see how much time had passed. Before me was the raw shape of a character who would live in my script. Because I had never written a drama before, fear was stopping me from gradually recording my ideas; the "spilling" technique worked.

I also tried writing morning pages, a technique developed by writer Julia Cameron (1992). These pages, written quickly upon awakening in the morning, are intended to help writers tap into their unconscious. I found that as I babbled on daily about trivial things and complained a great deal, sooner or later I had to face the pain, the anger, the uncomfortable. It seems that it often takes many pages of meaningless talk to strike at the very heart of what it is I need to write about. Morning pages helped me sift through the clutter to discover what I am most afraid of confronting. With this confrontation always comes pain, but later, inevitably, truth. As I write I hear the advice of May Sarton: "It always comes back to the same necessity: go deep enough and there is a bedrock of truth, however hard" (Cameron, 1992, p. 15).

Clustering

While all of the teacher-writers have students use mapping and webbing as well as freewrites to discover topics or to generate ideas about topics, Garry and Janeen sometimes have students combine both webbing or mapping and freewriting. Garry refers to a specific technique called clustering, developed by Rico (1983), which, like webbing, is a technique used to find ideas and form thoughts about them. A nucleus word, a short phrase, or a dominant impression is written in the center of a page with a circle around it, and is then followed by spontaneous, natural associations to the work, which are also circled and connected to it by arrows. Some of these connected words may spur other associations, leading to the topic or thoughts the writer wants and needs to express. Similar to freewriting, clustering is usually completed within a few minutes in order that people not censor what needs to be written. Rico notes that after discovering the main image or idea within a cluster, a freewrite five to ten minutes in length can help develop the topic quickly and almost effortlessly. She explains that clustering is a right-brain activity, and the right brain hemisphere encourages connections and

associations; conversely, writing ideas in sentences and paragraphs is primarily a left-brain activity, with the left brain hemisphere encouraging compartmentalization and division. Rico goes on to say, "Clustering generates right-brain involvement through an unimpeded flow of images, ideas, memories -- all emotionally tinged -- which lead to the vision of a tentative whole, enabling us to begin writing easily and coherently" (p. 82).

Rico also believes that clustering, being a right-brain activity, encourages people to be more open to wonder, to be more accepting of possibilities. She notes that too many people become frustrated with writing because they think they should automatically know which ideas to develop and where to begin. When they discover this is not the case, they either give up or force the writing. Explaining that the unfortunate result of such action is that people eventually forget to wonder, Rico goes on to state her belief that "Wondering means it's acceptable not to know, and it is a natural state at the beginning of all creative acts." (p. 29). I believe that many children and adults see clustering as less threatening than immediately beginning to write because their thoughts need not be formed into full sentences or complex ideas, and therefore the chances of an internal censor constantly chatting about the insufficiency of their grammar or content is lessened.

Circling words and drawing arrows while clustering appears to help visual learners see connections between ideas or the development of one idea more clearly. I often notice children doodling when they are asked to respond to an idea or to discover a topic. The act of doodling is a right-brain technique which appears to help many children think and incubate thoughts. Writer W.D. Valgardson claims that sketching for hours in isolation prepares him to write (Fowler, 1989). Marian notes that she gives students the opportunity to draw prior to writing a first draft. She herself took art courses and knows the value of using different media to discover what it is that needs to be said.

Dialogue

Another way the teacher-writers give students opportunities to discover their topics and thoughts about topics is to provide time for

dialogue. Glen notes that while not everyone needs to converse, "Some need to talk in order to rehearse the ideas that they might possibly include, so it's helpful for them to get together with another student or two and talk their way through what they are thinking about... Just the mere act of doing that makes them decide on this direction or that direction" (68). Garry paraphrases Britton's words (1970), saying that language begins at the point of utterance. He notes that sometimes all students need is someone to listen to them talk, and in talking they often arrive at the very idea they want and need to use. Janeen also gives students opportunities to brainstorm ideas with a partner in larger groups. She reminds me that, like freewriting and clustering techniques, brainstorming needs to be free of censorship, and so a group should be open and accepting of ideas which may turn out to be valuable, even if at first they appear trite or boorish.

While all of the teacher-writers value dialogue as a way to discover thought, none of them feel the need to dialogue when writing fiction. Marian notes that she can rely on interior dialogue to write her poetry. However, she does talk about her ideas for non-fiction with people who are struggling with the sorts of issues she wants to write about. Perhaps more experienced writers need to dialogue less about their fiction because they have developed other techniques to generate ideas and work through problems. Glen also warns, as many writers do, that in writing fiction, too much talk can be lethal, since the motivation to create is no longer as strong once the story has been told.

Receptivity

In talking about organizing and planning ideas; the teacher-writers emphasize the importance of being receptive to surprise, of not being insistent on staying with original notions of what a piece might look like. Glen warns students that despite the fact that generating and organizing ideas are significant processes in writing, excessive amounts of time spent on these processes may do more harm than good. He illustrates by using a personal example: "I may discover as I go that I want to write something different from what I thought, but I must be careful to allow myself to discover. If I write too rigidly and ignore surprises that

characters might introduce in fiction, for example, then I miss some of the vital life of writing." Janeen describes her experiences of discovery in telling of her thesis writing, later reflecting on the need for students to have these same types of experiences:

> You start with an idea and that idea starts changing on you. So you'll get something written and then you'll say, "I don't believe that any more," and you'll have to back up and re-do it. And the ideas will change, so there has to be room for that.... I guess if you're just doing all your writing in class to prepare and hand it in and get it graded, you're never going to go through that process of discovering, when something takes you in a different direction. And that's kind of interesting when a piece starts developing a life of its own.

Garry talks about surprises in writing novels, where characters begin to change or take on added significance that was never intended. In his most recent novel, *Crows*, he discovered while writing that his main character is divorced and without a companion. Glen talks about his characters living inside his head, insisting on doing and saying particular things, which he then surrenders to by following their wishes. This phenomena is quite common amongst novelists. William Faulkner notes that his fiction, "begins with a character, usually, and once he stands up on his feet and begins to move, all I do is trot alongside him with a paper and pencil trying to keep up long enough to put down what he says and does" (Murray, 1990, p. 101). In a conversation with Robert Kroetsch (1970), Margaret Laurence says, "Don't you think that when you are surprised like this that very often the writing is the best, because by this time you are not a puppet master? I feel that very strongly about my characters.... In a profound sense you are not manipulating them. They are free -- it isn't that you set them free -- they are free" (p. 59).

While Glen talks about the need to be open to discovery, he does insist upon knowing the ending of his novels prior to beginning to write a first draft. Again, many other writers agree, saying that it propels them forward to completion and gives them a sense of direction, even if they revise the ending, which is often what happens. Murray (1990) cites

writer William Gibson, who says, "I always know the end. The end of everything I write is somehow implicit from the beginning. What I don't know is the middle. I don't know how I'm going to get there." Dorothea Brande (1934) suggests deciding on both a first and last sentence for a story before beginning to write: "Then you can use the first sentence as a springboard from which to dive into your work, and the last as a raft to swim toward" (p. 142).

As writers, the teachers are all aware of discovering seeds for writing in various sources, depending on the genre they are working in. For example, three of the four writers talk about beginning to compose poetry based on strong images, usually after observing events or people. However, when composing a narrative, they sometimes develop the initial idea around a character partially based on the attributes of a person or people they encounter. Brande (1934) similarly talks about the different inclinations of short story writers and novelists. She notes that those who write complete anecdotes, crisp dialogue, or character sketches that are brief and concerned with general traits may be more inclined to write short stories; writers who consider motives, examine themselves carefully, and subtly analyze characters may be budding novelists. These points lead me to think about content determining form, about discovering form after discovering initial ideas for a piece. Murray (1990) talks about "organic form" that develops from within rather than externally (p. 149). Although none of the teachers mention their students attempting this, they have shown them subtle differences in discovering ideas when working with particular genres.

Drafting and Revising

While discovery writing is often thought of as "pre-writing," it can also occur at various points in people's writing processes. Glen asks himself questions about a character if, in the middle of a novel, he cannot decide how to proceed. He states, "I want this character to be walking and talking in my head. There's magic in story writing when the character actually becomes alive and is walking and talking in the writer's head and insisting." Similarly, Marian says if she is writing drama, she may write an out scene, which is not actually used on stage, but helps

clarify the relationship between the characters on stage. Garry and Janeen emphasize the use of literature models to help students see how a particular writer works through drafting problems similar to their own. Garry notes that literature including cartoons like *Calvin and Hobbes* also helps students get ideas for writing. Marian too mentions getting many of her own ideas for a piece from reading.

The act of revising is also viewed as a process of discovery for all of the writers, who talk about "playing" with words and ideas which leads to delightful surprises and new directions in a piece. Janeen talks about this process when she uses a thesaurus to develop a poem:

> Things happen when you get out the thesaurus -- you might get one word and you'll say, "Well now, there's a little bit of alliteration here. Can I pick this up and go further with it? How does it get my point across and what does it emphasize?" And so it's a process where exploring one avenue may lead you to another avenue.

Janeen's words remind me that the experience of discovery is one reason many writers choose to continue writing. Teachers need to provide opportunities for their students to engage in discovery at various points in writing processes.

Writers' Notebooks

> Art is not about thinking something up. It is about the opposite -- getting something down.
>
> Julia Cameron

Marian believes that being a writer is not something that people can turn on and off at will -- it has to do with an attitude or a way of looking at the world. Observing, listening, tasting surroundings. "A freshness of response," as Brande says (1934, p. 38). Brande maintains such a response includes seeing "traits and characteristics as though they were new-minted from the hand of God instead of sorting them quickly into dusty categories and pigeon-holing them without wonder or surprise."

(p. 38). All of the teacher-writers talk about the importance of noticing, being aware and using all their senses, and three of the four record their observations in a notebook. Instead of actively searching for ideas, they jot down such elements as images, bits of dialogue, character traits and events of interest to them which are the sources and seeds of further writing. As a result, these notebooks represent a significant part of their existence as writers. Calkins (1991), a strong advocate of writer's notebooks, says that "Notebooks can become a habit of life, one that helps us recognize that our lives are filled with material for writing. 'Look at the world,' notebooks seems to say. 'Look at the world in all its grandeur and all its horror. Let it matter'" (p. 43).

Two of the four teachers have students use writer's notebooks in their classes, but all of them encourage students to examine their worlds carefully in order to understand, like Cameron (1992), that when receptive, we need only to record, not struggle unnaturally in the search for ideas. Robert Penn Warren (*The Paris Review Interviews*, 1958) insists, "You don't choose a story, it chooses you," provided that "you live right" (p. 195, 197). Writers who notice people, places and events find story everywhere. The stories that attract them are worked into drafts of writing, often after the seeds of characters or plots have been recorded in notebooks. Jack Hodgins (1993) maintains that when he sees connections between potential ideas, "Some kind of explosion occurs, where fuzzy characters come clear and a story begins to take on a life" (p. 31). Bomer (1995) helps students recognize the ideas that attract them by having them review their notebooks to determine a pattern or an emphasis on certain images, people, events or places. Student-writers are then better able to see the significance of keeping a notebook and become more aware of their own desires to write about particular topics of interest.

Since I have been carrying a notebook with me, I seem to be much more aware of my environment and day to day incidents simply because I know that I can record them while they are fresh in my mind. I am more aware of my own self -- I often look at myself now as though I am a writer commenting on one of her characters. There is an out-of-body

distant awareness of my self that has, paradoxically, helped me in examining myself closely.

A few weeks ago, I was sitting in my car, beads of sweat eroding my patience, when a man in front of me failed to drive through the light which had been green for at least three seconds. As I cocked my wrist to sound the horn, I noticed the man gazing contentedly out his car window. I knew instantly that this scene was one that needed to be written about: a frantic, rushed, impatient woman angry with a dreamer, an observer, a contemplater of life -- or perhaps a reflection on the irony of having some writerly qualities poking out of someone else's body, nudging me to wake up. I learned that day by watching myself. An outsider peeking in.

Glen believes notebooks to be valuable if students not only record images and events, but reflect on them as well. By reflecting, students begin to develop voice and a sense of conviction in their writing:

> It's discovery writing in effect, saying, "I haven't really gone there before, so I don't have an opinion. Now when I go there, I follow it through, I sort it out, I think it through and I come to a conclusion which is mine." So it's a new experience: "I've got a new opinion and it's me, it's mine."

Calkins (1991) also notes the importance of using notebooks or similar tools in order to reflect: "In the hurry of our lives and in the rush of the inflated curriculum, we need rituals and tools that invite us to pause and make meaning from the bits of our lives. In order for this to happen in classrooms, teachers and children need to listen not only to each other but also to themselves" (p. 57).

In order to assist students in seeing the world as a writer might and in reflecting on their observations, the teacher-writers use writing notebooks or similar techniques to model their own observations and contemplations. Murray (1968) insists that teachers must model a writerly way of being:

> The teacher should bring into class, conversationally and casually, the mention of things which happened to him on the

> way to school, or last week-end, or when he was a student himself. He should demonstrate his own awareness of the world and encourage his students to examine their world spontaneously. He should listen to what they have to say and not be critical of their version of the world, or of their own world. Instead, he should get them to look critically at their world, by asking good questions about it (p. 28).

Glen uses a notebook to plan his ideas in detail, and Marian uses it for drafting and for recording and organizing ideas. Rief (1992) uses her notebook for these reasons too, but she and her students also include any favourite quotations in literature they read and any thoughts about what they are reading. This format replaces her initial assigned reading logs because she believes it is difficult and unnatural to separate reading and writing. Similarly, Goldberg (1993) keeps all of her writing, such as journals, letters, and poems, in one notebook. She says this is her way of "digesting" herself -- to be "in the soup of [her] own mind" (p. 45).

Glen and Marian warn of the dangers of limiting notebooks to a teacher's strict guidelines, which could lead students to despise instead of love writing. Glen notes,

> If we clearly link writing to thinking and say that discovery writing or journal writing done in this sense is really an opportunity for them to capture their thoughts and externalize those thoughts and reflect on those thoughts, then you don't want to have excessive constraints. It has to have a certain amount of openness to it. Then they discover the joy of working at writing for themselves. The student who discovers that writing can give him something is a student who will be a life-long writer.

Marian talks about journal overkill; in a given semester, some students may write journals for every teacher in every course. It is not the idea of a journal that is the problem, however; it is that people tend to take a relatively open-ended concept and turn it into one that allows no space for students or teachers. As Marian says, "It seems like every time somebody

gets an idea, everybody hops on the bandwagon and thinks, 'This is the way to do it.'" The pre-packaged answer to teaching, to learning. Writers usually don't limit their notebooks with guidelines and rules. When we as teachers begin to impose our own vision of journals or notebooks, the writing, as Rief (1992) implies, becomes contrived, less real.

Play and Creativity

When the teacher-writers record ideas in notebooks, they often speak of "playing" or "tinkering" with the ideas, of exploring possibilities. The notion of play in fact is very much a part of discovery writing for many writers. Janeen says that the play in discovery writing is what she enjoys most of all in her own writing processes. Teacher Randy Bomer (1995) notes that the greatest writers have retained a sense of play throughout their lives. He believes the capacity for playfulness can be experienced by students writing in notebooks. Because students do not feel pressure to "perform" by producing a product, they may take more risks with their thinking and writing, enabling them to draw on the child within who plays with words, ideas and objects naturally. Nachmanovitch (1990) talks about play as the starting point of creativity, and cites Carl Jung, who believes, "The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves" (p. 42). However, Nachmanovitch believes that often the notion of play is confused with game:

> "Play" is different from "game." Play is the free spirit of exploration, doing and being for its own pure joy. Game is an activity defined by a set of rules, like baseball, sonnet, symphony, diplomacy. Play is an attitude, a spirit, a way of doing things, whereas game is a defined activity with rules and a playing field and participants (p. 43).

Because play is an attitude, Marian notes that it, like a writer's awareness, is not something that can be "boxed up" and given to kids. However,

when a teacher-writer models the free spirit of play and allows students to see what writers notice and think about, Marian says they can begin to understand play and awareness as states of being. Janeen talks about getting students to respond to novel objects and music as a way into creative play. She and Glen also ask themselves "what if" questions, constantly pondering possibilities. Glen says "I use organizers to organize playfulness. What if, what about, what if this were changed, what if we did that, what if this did happen. This is ridiculous, but what if this did happen. And so I try to get creativity to come out by being unbound instead of limited." Through this response, Glen implies a close relationship between play and creativity. Nachmanovitch (1990) would agree: "Play is the taproot from which original art springs; it is the raw stuff that the artist channels and organizes with all his learning and technique" (p. 42). Amabile's studies in creativity (1986) have led her to deduce that "engaging in playful activities can increase subsequent creativity" (p. 185). Perhaps teachers who encourage play as a natural part of writing will witness an increase in their students' capacity for creativity.

Incubation

Writers often comment on having to wait for an idea to sprout before or after placing some thoughts down on paper. Glen notes that writing in notebooks helps encourage incubation:

> I hold ideas in my mind before I write and I think them through when I'm driving here and there when I sort out pieces of writing. When I've got fifteen minutes or half an hour waiting for someone I take a notebook out and I write down possibilities. So incubation is very, very important, and that's why I keep writers' notebooks all over the place, because I'm incubating to some extent.

Both Janeen and Glen talk about using a great deal of time preparing to write, and part of this time is spent pondering the ideas or doing related activities that feed the incubation process. In writing her master's thesis,

Janeen notes that "There's a lot of time spent thinking and making notes and letting the ideas kind of simmer. And so there's nothing tangible. Someone will say, 'Well what have you done?' Well there's not a lot tangible. 'Well I read a book today and I made some notes.'" Most of the writers in Hawryluk's study (1990) also note that they learned not to begin writing when an idea first surfaces; they wait for their writing to grow in the unconscious.

All of the teacher-writers also recognize the necessity for incubation when they are stuck at a point in writing a draft and need distance from it. They tend to trust that this distancing will help free the unconscious thoughts needed to continue writing the piece. Francoise Sagan (*The Paris Review Interviews*, 1958) makes notes for a novel and then thinks about it for two years before writing it relatively quickly and with little effort. Similarly, Ray Bradbury (1990) writes of visiting Ireland and several years later suddenly having a play and short story about his experiences fully developed in his mind, ready to record.

Because the teacher-writers experience a need for incubation themselves, they talk about this process with students and give them the space and flexibility to use it when needed. Nachmanovitch (1990) maintains,

> In the art of teaching, we recognize that ideas and insights need to cook over a period of time. Sometimes the student who is least articulate about expressing the ideas is in fact the one who is absorbing and processing them the most deeply. This applies as well to our own private learning of an art form; the areas in which we feel most stuck and most incompetent may be our richest gold mine of developing material. The use of silence in teaching then becomes very powerful (p. 157).

Whether incubating initial ideas for writing or whether leaving a piece half developed to allow for percolating processes, the teacher-writers talk about the need for intense concentration on the subject or the writing prior to this process. Glen notes that he continuously goes back to an idea when he has a chance and consciously develops it; this

conscious process then affects the unconscious which works further to develop the ideas. Marian notes that she repeats an initial line of a poem in her head again and again to not only develop further verse consciously, but also to let the essence of the lines work in the unconscious to help her along:

> What I do when I'm writing is usually start with a phrase or a line and I just repeat that line to myself and that phrase to myself. And if nothing else happens to it I put it away and I repeat it again and then I put it away. And then eventually other things start to grow from that. I'll have more than one phrase; there'll be a couple of phrases. I'll write those down and I'll repeat those to myself. And then sometimes when I sit down, I'll be able to do a page or a couple of pages, a lot of which will get pruned out eventually, but at least it's a start.

Harman and Rheingold (1984) believe that if we assign our unconscious a problem, and state this problem completely with focused concentration, it can come up with a solution. The degree of desire or the strength of intent "affects the priority our idea processor assigns to a problem. The more important we make a question seem to the processor, the higher a priority it sets on arriving at a solution" (p. 24-25). Robert Penn Warren (*The Paris Review Interviews*, 1958) disputes the description of the creation of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" as a piece that miraculously appeared in a dream. He notes, "If the work is done the dream will come to the man who's ready for that particular dream; it's not going to come from just dreaming in general" (p. 197). Glen too mentions writing a first draft quickly after having time to both consciously and unconsciously ponder the piece he plans to write.

There is a paradox involved in concentration techniques: if a writer tries to concentrate on the subject at hand at all times, incubation processes may not lead to illumination. As Nachmanovitch (1990) points out, it is only when we give our minds space by thinking and doing other things that the unconscious begins to surface:

> The annals of art and science are full of stories of men and women who, desperately stuck on an enigma, have worked until they reached their wit's end, and then suddenly made their longed-for creative leap or synthesis while doing errands or daydreaming. The ripening takes place when their attention is directed elsewhere (p. 153).

Janeen and Garry talk about illumination occuring when they go for walks. Marian and Janeen discover ideas when showering. Glen talks about uncovering ideas when driving. Cameron (1994) notes that all of these activities are repetitive and do not require high degrees of concentration, which allows the unconscious thoughts to surface more easily. They are often part of "quiet time," in which being alone spurs creative illumination. The teacher-writers emphasize a need for quiet time both when writing and when having moments of illumination. Janeen reflects,

> You get into a certain relaxed state. It can happen in the shower, it can happen as you're trying to fall asleep. I've written a lot of things as I'm falling asleep and I have to get up and go write them down right away or they're gone, because I'll sit and I'll compose lines that go together and I'll write that down and finish the poem the next day, but if I don't write it down right then, it's gone. And so that quiet place is important, where there aren't those other distractions.

The teacher-writers comments remind me of writer Sharon Butala (1994), who talks about the benefits of moving from an environment fraught with tension and competitiveness to a farm in an isolated part of Saskatchewan, where she could hear herself think. Students need quiet time too, and the teacher-writers give them opportunities in the classroom to be immersed in their own heads, in their own worlds. However, it is difficult for many students to enter a peaceful, relaxed state in the short time frame of an individual class block; they often do not have home environments conducive to moments of illumination either.

Education psychologist Jane Healy (1990) writes extensively about what inhibits and enhances brain development in children; she notes that "Youngsters who are hurried from one activity to another may get lots of sensory input but be shortchanged on the time-consuming process of forming association networks to understand and organize experience meaningfully" (p. 74). In order for students to write about experiences or construct imaginative worlds they must first have the time to process experiences and thoughts both consciously and unconsciously. Teachers can help to a certain extent by granting some space and time in classrooms, and by creating opportunities for writing workshops, folders and portfolios which allow for these conditions. However, they may want to talk to students' parents about the real need for quiet time, the need, as Marian says, "to be alone with your thoughts."

While being aware of the need for incubation, three of the teacher-writers talk about the fact that some students may use the process as an excuse not to write, or as a reason for procrastinating. In fact, even for experienced writers, there may be a fine line between waiting and procrastinating. Goldberg (1990) attempts to define the difference between the two:

> Procrastination is pushing aside or putting off writing. It is thinking the moment is tomorrow.... Waiting is something full bodied. Perhaps waiting isn't even a good word for it. Pregnant is better. You've worked on something for a while. You are excited by it, even happy, but you are wise and step back. You take a walk, but this walk isn't to avoid the writing on your desk. It is a walk full of your writing. It is also full of the trees you pass, the river, the sky. You are letting writing work for you.
>
> Procrastination is a cutting off. It diminishes you (p. 211).

Goldberg does recognize, however, that when beginning to write a piece, waiting for the perfect idea can be detrimental since it signifies procrastination. Similarly, Garry talks about continuing to write whether or not the waiting has proved fruitful: "Sometimes you just have to wait,

and it happens. But that doesn't mean you stop writing. So I don't think you talk about writing, you write." Brande (1934) encourages writers to take a three day incubation period, but she says that no matter what occurs in this time period, the writer must sit down and begin composing immediately after the time has passed.

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Discovery writing, like the teaching of writing, does not have a list of rules to follow or a recipe for success. It does, however, depend largely on the writer's ability to notice, observe, reflect. It is nurtured by receptivity, yet simultaneously thrives on perspiration -- leading to inspiration. Internal censors as Marian jokes, need to be told to "go for a smoke." Students can learn much from teacher-writers who experience and revel in discovery writing, but they must have conditions conducive to creating. Some of these conditions, like having access to flexible time, choice, models of writers' awareness and tools like freewrites and writer's notebooks, can encourage real discovery. Other conditions, such as internal peace of mind and relaxation, are more difficult for students to attain because society and family can have an overwhelming impact on the inability of children to enter into and feel comfortable with being alone and quiet in their minds.

Chapter 4
Responding to Writing

> Making a movie is like climbing a mountain. The higher you get, the more tired and breathless you become, but your view becomes much more extensive.
>
> Ingmar Bergman

As published writers, the teachers in this study emphasize the importance of response to initial or advanced drafts, which often results in effective revision of the work. Novelists may stop writing to reread a chapter, considering the direction of the plot or character development. Poets might read a draft aloud to build on parts where voice is strong. Essayists might share their work with fellow writers to gain other perspectives. During my interviews with the teacher-writers, I had the opportunity to hear about the ways in which they respond to their own writing as well as their students' compositions. They also talk about peer feedback and self-assessment, noting that writing requires such response in order for authors of all ages to gain new perspectives about work in progress.

Oral Response

When the teacher-writers talk about responding to student writing, they focus on the importance of oral response rather than written response. Glen and Garry believe the immediacy of response is crucial at times; students who need to dialogue about a particular part of their writing may not find written comments useful if made days or a week after the fact. Marian and Janeen talk about writing detailed comments and later discovering that students did not really comprehend what had been written. Janeen notes, "I think this happens because in conversation, I'll use several examples or rephrase something several times; whereas, in written comments, I may give one example along with suggestions." Janeen's students sometimes say, "Now I know what you mean," after

conversing with her, but she too benefits from the discussion by discovering their true intentions.

While students often need oral feedback to develop their pieces and writing skills, Marian notes that sometimes they simply need to know that their teacher has "paid attention to their writing." Conversations build relationships, trust, and consequently enhance the feeling of safety necessary to take risks with writing. She observes this phenomenon after she has many conversations with students:

> All of a sudden they'll hand you something that they've risked a little bit of themselves in. I think of it as a turtle in its shell. And you know if it gets scared it pulls everything in, and the only thing that's sticking out is the tip of the nose. And so my job now, particularly working with reluctant writers, is to just coax those little turtles out and get them to poke their heads out first of all, and then when they realize that they're not going to get their heads chopped off, then they can start with one foot, the other foot, and pretty soon you've got the whole turtle and then you can start to move.

Garry is similarly aware of the fragility of students: "Why would you want to cut off a flower before it's even had a chance to bud or to flower?" The metaphors these teacher-writers use show a sensitivity to having conversations with students which promote self-esteem and confidence. While these student attributes may be developed through written response, human contact is often much more powerful, and, as Marian says, encourages them to view themselves as writers and have writerly conversations. Tom Romano (1987) believes in conferencing "because it is so immediately human. A written response does not feature an open, helpful facial expression, eyes that show interest, a human voice repeating a writer's words and asking genuine questions based upon them" (p. 103).

After reading Kathy Sanford's dissertation (1997) and joining her in a writer's group, I've been thinking that in some ways the term "conference" is inappropriate. The word conjures up images of a formal

meeting where people dress in uncomfortable clothes and present themselves in a favourable light, usually to people who are the "big-wigs." Relationships are not strengthened during conferences because people are often too concerned with not being themselves, with being the people they would like to be, not the people they are. Students too, when they have conferences with teachers, may desperately try to present themselves in a subconsciously false way; they are so used to wearing a mask that they no longer know how to present their real, honest faces.

Conferences are almost always planned in advance, yet students often need to talk immediately. While planned conversations may be necessary and are certainly useful, teachers should try having more conversations with students where talk between two writers is based on genuine, often spontaneous response to a piece of writing.

When past students recognize me, giving me a hug in the middle of a crowded street, I think that it must be my teaching skills they remember. No. But they do comment on how I always took time to read their writing and talk about it with them. One girl told me that she will let me know when she publishes her first book of poetry. Another girl talked about her growing collection of songs, some already performed in her band. These young women have talents no greater than most students, yet they see themselves as writers. Real conversations can do this for students. Conversations that let them know that another writer cares about them and their writing.

In my own writing group, I would never say, "Let's have a conference." It almost sounds absurd. But I often say, "Let's get together and talk about our writing." Interesting -- the way school vocabulary can differ so much from the words we naturally use in other places and contexts.

The oral response the teacher-writers give also helps students take ownership over their writing, which in turn increases their confidence as writers. Garry tells students that he will only give them suggestions or constructive criticism if they ask for it. He believes that this method relieves stress on some writers who worry constantly about criticism; once they gain confidence from the praise, they want to improve their writing and so take the responsibility of initiating conversations about

possible areas of improvement. Romano (1987) notes that "In our haste to tell young writers how to do things, we forget that merely telling of new concepts doesn't usually lead to learning, and that students learn what they're ready to learn, itching to learn" (p. 100).

Prior to discussing student drafts with the individual writers, Marian asks them to write a memo on their piece which briefly indicates what they want her to specifically respond to when reading the piece and what stage they are at in the process of completing the piece. She reads these memos and compositions carefully and, like Tom Romano (1987), writes brief shorthand notes in her own files and has a conversation with the student-writers the following day. Rather than imposing their own intentions and suggestions on specific compositions, Janeen and Glen ask students questions to help them articulate intentions and areas they need and want to develop. Like the teacher-writers' students, Calkins (1994), during her first writing conference with Murray, was immediately faced with responding to a question, rather than having her writing responded to:

> "What *do* I need help on?" Although I didn't realize it at the time, if Murray regarded his job as putting himself out of a job, if he sees his job as interacting with me in ways that taught me how to interact with my writing, he accomplished a large part of it simply by insisting that our conferences begin with my taking responsibility for their direction. (p. 224).

Graves (1983) suggests that often when children's discussions of their topic are complete, a teacher can ask a series of questions which, rather than defeating them, challenges them to reflect on their intentions in the writing. Marian challenges students with questions as much as possible without discouraging or frustrating them. In order to do this, she needs to have many conversations with them which build student-teacher relationships. Graves (1983) similarly notes,

> Any question is a risk for both teacher and child. But the more the teacher and child work together, the more risks can

> be taken. The challenge to stretch thinking, accept new risks with information, to rethink original intentions can be brought into the conference. The teacher may ask a question that thoroughly stumps the child: children give ample enough clues that they don't understand. But the more teacher and child have worked together, the more the child will dare to say, "I don't know what you mean. I'm confused" (p. 114).

Glen and Janeen talk about students often unconsciously coming up with a solution to a problem which surfaces simply by dialoguing with someone. Graves (1983) says that talking helps reveal what we already know. In helping students arrive at their own solutions, Murray, in his essay, "Teaching the Other Self" (1982), maintains,

> When the teacher insists that the student knows the subject and the writing process that produced the draft better than the teacher, and then has faith that the student has an other self that has monitored the producing of the draft, then the teacher puts enormous pressure on the student. Intelligent comments are expected, and when they are expected they are often received (p. 170).

Murray's belief encourages the reflective, critical thinking which every writer needs, particularly after producing a draft or two; furthermore, he believes that every writer has the capacity to use the "other self." A teacher's job is to assist in developing this self partly through the act of listening. Tom Romano (1987) says that as a high school teacher himself, listening does not come naturally and can be exceedingly difficult: "High school English teachers have subject matter to transmit. We know *the* way to do things. We know how to construct a paragraph, how to excise redundancy, how to maintain a point of view, how to formulate a thesis. We know so much that students don't. We must fill them up with all we know. So we make dogma of minutia." (p. 100). Similarly, Bomer (1995) says, "I have to be less concerned with what the students are

supposed to *get* and more concerned with what the students can *make* with the materials they already have" (p. 10).

Graves (1983) talks about teachers beginning to enjoy listening once they look for potential in a student's piece, rather than looking for ways to "fix" it. He and Rief (1992) encourage teachers to follow a child by attending to what she or he knows. Marian too focuses on what her students can do. She notes that a teacher does not need to address every weakness students have, since they cannot work on all elements at the same time and usually become discouraged when they try to.

Writing Process and Conferencing Re-Visited

Since the teacher-writers are careful to leave the ownership of the written product with students, they use conversations with them as a way to enhance individual writing processes in particular genres. When process approaches to teaching writing first became popular, many teachers adapted them into formula, lock-step "packages" which assumed that all writers use one process in a particular sequence for all genres. Writing in various genres themselves, the teachers in my study use conversations to show individuals or groups of students possibilities in using processes. They also share different processes that have worked for them in particular forms. Applebee (1986) expresses his concern that process approaches have been largely underconceptualized:

> Some tasks require much planning and organizing before the writer can begin; some require careful editing before being shared with a critical audience; some involve sharing of familiar experiences within well-learned formats and require no further process supports at all. Indeed, the universe of writing tasks, both in and out of school, is large and diverse.... In part, because students of writing processes have ignored this diversity, process-oriented instruction easily degenerates into an inappropriate and lockstep formula. If instruction is not conceptualized to make the link between process and product explicit and real, the approach is easily trivialized. Rather than suggesting a range of

> strategies for solving problems, process instruction will become just another series of practice exercises (p. 102-103).

By talking with and listening to individual writers, teachers can avoid falling into a pattern in which teaching writing becomes little more than lecturing and providing blanket "answers" to writing processes.

Just as writing process can be accompanied by rule-filled manuals, so too can conversations with students. Graves (1983) notes that teachers often ask him for a list of questions to use in conferences, but as Marian says, "the armour" is useless since each child is different. Drafts are at various points of development, forms and genres differ; she forms questions spontaneously after listening. Tobin (1990) reminds us that although some well-known educators have suggested ways to conference which have become ritualized in many schools, "we need to move beyond a set of rigid rules for writing conference teachers to an approach that takes into account the dynamic aspects of each writing conference, the student's relationship to the text, the teacher's relationship to the text, and the student and teacher's relationship to each other." (p. 99). Moher (1990) notes that her conference strategies over the past few years have become varied and that she is now "without an agenda" (p. 79) when she converses with her students.

Marian recognizes that many educators and researchers have recommended that teachers not suggest ways to improve a piece of writing, but she believes that sometimes it is necessary. She notes that students approach her and say, "Ms. Hood, you're a writer, what would you do here?" When students ask her for suggestions, she, like Garry, knows they have an investment in their writing and that they want to improve. While she avoids giving students one definitive "answer," and gives them the opportunity to adapt suggestions or develop their own solutions, she does provide a number of possibilities which show them various ways of approaching their particular problem. When Garry discusses his own processes, he reminds me that there are few rules in writing; we need to begin questioning long-standing, taken-for-granted rules in the teaching of writing.

When teachers follow a pattern for conferencing and use a list of prepared questions, they may begin to respond in ways that are

unintentionally false; they repeat the same phrase over and over, such as "Perhaps you could try more description." Comments may also become more general as the "rules" limit spontaneity and surprise. Similarly, written comments fall prey to dehumanization. We write repetitive, robotic, toneless responses. In an effort to reach everyone, we fail to reach anyone. As writers, the teachers in this study know the importance of receiving thoughtful, humane responses to their own writing, and are consequently aware of responding to individuals, not words on paper.

In reading Garry's manuscript of Crows, *I was amazed at my almost instinctive need to respond in "teacher language." Somehow, over several years of responding to student writing, I had developed certain catch phrases which repeatedly surfaced whenever I wrote comments on students' pieces. The phrases are similar to those I notice in the written responses of colleagues -- phrases that seem to be common amongst English language arts teachers. However, I can no longer allow myself to write such comments because deep inside I feel them to be false. I need to respond with all of the spontaneous, genuine thoughts that "real" readers have to a piece. Garry's novel made me laugh, cry, wonder and reflect. Why was my affective response to his creation not visible on the page?*

Looking back at the moment I returned the manuscript, I know I needed to do much more than leave Garry with a handful of comments on yellow stickies. I needed to sit down with him and have a conversation about the work. To celebrate it, but also to share my reflections about parts that moved me. A conversation between a reader and a writer.

Responding to writing -- I am slowly learning to be alive again to the words of others. It feels good to breathe out the same air that I take in.

Peer Sharing of Writing

When You Begin To Write
(For K.W.)

You have stood here before.
Remember? Perspiration greased
the violin; your heart tympanied.
It is only the disguise that is different.
Words now quaver out,
to drift and settle while you wait,
hardly breathing until someone says
something, anything.
Time will quiet the protests
that rise behind your teeth. You'll
learn to read the silences.
With time your throat will no longer
taste of sand, as words polished smooth
grow oddly jagged in the mouth.
These are welcome things
because new places will open so when you close again
in the silent dark
your words will hover still
singing in the future.

- Marian R. Hood
(Published in *The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 1996.* Copyright remains with the author.)

All of the teacher-writers view peer sharing of writing as necessary to the development of writers. Often, as Marian's poem implies, the mere act of reading a work aloud to an audience helps the writer grow in several ways. "Words polished smooth grow oddly jagged in the mouth" is an experience that all the teacher-writers mentioned when sharing a piece with an audience. They talk about sensing that a line or a phrase is not quite "right" -- an experience that occurs only when the words are

read aloud. Glen explains by using an example of a poem he recently wrote:

> When I read it I change the wording because I have a better way of doing it, and I have to sit down and change it on the page. My ear hears what doesn't read well and what could read better, so that's why I think it's important for students to have an opportunity to read as listeners, and that it not just be a silent reading of somebody's writing.

Marian talks about needing to have a flow in writing which comes from sounding out her writing externally and internally. Even during the beginning stages of a piece, she repeats a phrase over and over until something else connects to it. Rico (1983) notes that human beings are naturally drawn to sound in language, and gives the example of young children who delight in nursery rhymes, alliteration and nonsense verse. When we stop reading aloud and stop sharing our writing with an audience, we gradually lose our awareness of the importance of sound in language. I have heard many teachers say that poetry is meant to be read aloud; we need to consider reading all genres aloud. Calkins (1991) writes, "We've often encouraged students to teach us what they know and care about, but we have only rarely valued the lilt and pace and idiom of their language. We have often responded to writers by telling them what we have learned from a piece, but we have only rarely told them about the phrases that have musical appeal for us" (p. 284).

Glen believes society has divorced itself from the oral tradition, forgetting the fascinating experience it is for both writer and audience. He urges people to begin sharing their writing with others: "The more we get writers and audiences [together], the more we have human experience chronicled and shared, the more exciting it is." Garry talks about exciting moments, "magical moments," when his creative writing students share their writing: two girls sang a poem to the beat of a drum; one shy boy stood up on a desk and read his work with great confidence. While I spent time in Janeen's class, several of her students also took great pride in sharing their poems and were rewarded with hearty applause and cheers as well as specific positive comments on the content

by their peers. As I shared my own poetry in Garry's classroom, I felt the students listening, attentive to every word; these moments made me even more aware of my voice, the sound of the words as they gently flew from my tongue, perched on the eardrums of others.

When I listen to my husband play the synthesizer and drums, I now have a greater appreciation for his playful love of sound. While I've always known that he is gifted musically, only recently have I been aware of his delight in language which includes elements of music and song, such as repetition, rhyme and alliteration. I wonder if musically inclined students might be drawn to language more than others, particularly if language in schools is used and celebrated musically, playfully. When I return to teaching, I want to create an oral culture within the community of writers, a culture that plays with sounds and delights in the creation of musical language. Language that harmonizes gifts of melody in the minds and bodies of others.

Peer Response Groups

Three of the four teacher-writers meet with their writing groups on a regular basis to share drafts orally. In fact, Janeen and Marian are in the same writing group called the L-Group which has had a poetry anthology, *Bending Light* (1993) published. They also enroled in creative writing courses taught by the same instructors, who were very influential in shaping their own poetry group's ways of responding to writing. After listening to the writer read a piece aloud, the L-Group usually begins to discuss it. The writer listens carefully and records notes related to the responses. Janeen and Marian try not to respond to comments or questions too soon, but rather, just listen to the discussion of their pieces. Janeen notes,

> I won't respond right away because if somebody doesn't understand something, I want to hear how people are trying to work out what the work means. And if I can hear the discussion, then I can see what the problems are, or that this

> word is too ambiguous, or that I didn't put in this information. And if I can just sit back and listen... I write down on my copy of the poem what they're saying. Even if I don't agree with it, I write it down and then I can think about it.

Elbow (1973) similarly believes that "If you talk you'll keep readers from telling you important reactions" (p. 101).

When first trying to listen carefully, Marian admits she wanted to interrupt the conversation at times to defend or explain; however, as her poem "When You Begin To Write" implies, she learned to see the value in simply listening to how the reader comes to understand her poems. Elbow (1973) echoes her reaction by acknowledging that writers will feel frightened when first sharing their piece with an audience, but that "most people are liberated by finally getting the reactions they fear most" (p. 83). Elbow goes on to suggest that, while uncomfortable, the writer should allow time for listeners to respond after reading in order for impressions to become clear. As Marian advises in her poem, "You'll learn to read the silences."

When Marian talks about peer response to writing with her students, she tells them, "the best thing you can do is to give someone a mirror of their own writing -- to let them know how it is that you see their writing." Elbow (1973), using a similar metaphor, explains that responding to writing is like revealing movies of the mind: the images, thoughts and emotions which occur while the piece is being read and listened to. He suggests to student writers that "As a reader giving your reactions, keep in mind that you are not answering a timeless, theoretical question about the objective qualities of those words on that page. You are answering a time-bound, subjective but *factual* question: what happened in *you* when you read the words *this time*" (p. 85). Gere and Stevens (1985) interviewed a junior high teacher who similarly believes the value of group response is that "it gives the students a chance to see how their writing affects other people so the students can 'internalize' that information and make whatever judgements they deem necessary" (p. 87).

Elbow's movie-making response technique is similar to Garry's suggestion to look at "what works" and what "doesn't work." Murray

(1968) uses this same terminology. Marian emphasizes that her response is primarily as a reader and that she tries to help students ask questions and make comments as "real" readers. Glen and Janeen talk about helping students respond by giving them a list of items to look for when reading a piece written in a certain genre or one that incorporates certain stylistic techniques. Janeen says her students have more success in responding to writing when she asks them to look for a few specific qualities in their partners' writing. Because students are growing writers, they often struggle with some of the finer points of response; if they can concentrate on some elements they may have success not only in helping a fellow writer, but also in advancing their own writing. Glen similarly uses a list of questions which helps students focus and respond specifically. He notes that ideally, students reach a point at which they no longer need questions or check-lists to help them through a response; he often uses far fewer check-lists at the end of a semester than he does at the beginning.

The two types of feedback used by the teacher-writers and their students are effectively labelled by Elbow (1981) as reader-based and criterion-based. Summarizing his definition of the two words, he states, "Criterion-based feedback, then, tells you how your writing measures up, reader-based feedback tells you what it does to readers" (p. 241). For instance, a criterion-based comment might be, "This paragraph needs to be organized more effectively," whereas a reader-based comment of a similar nature might be "I felt lost when reading this paragraph."

Like Janeen and Glen, Elbow notes that criterion-based feedback is useful in that it gives people a sense of what qualities to look for in writing. Glen uses descriptive scales called rubrics to help students understand specific criteria within one or more pieces of writing. Because such scales address specific criteria, Elbow believes the writer can revise more easily. When writers have a clear idea of the criteria they need to work toward, they can also give themselves effective feedback. Elbow notes that if teachers use the same criteria to evaluate a piece of writing, students may be more apt to revise it. Janeen and Marian believe a certain comfort zone is necessary for some students before they begin to write; Marian observes high school students relax and focus as they write if they understand the specific criteria or

particular techniques to work toward. Criterion-based feedback provides this comfort for anxious students.

Despite the strengths of criterion-based feedback, Elbow (1981) admits that he finds reader-based feedback even more useful. He believes that it leads to long-term revision rather than the revision of one particular piece because writers can accumulate "raw data" which allows them to hear how their writing really affects an audience. When students are asked to translate their spontaneous thoughts and feelings about a piece into established criteria, important information may be lost. Elbow gives the example of readers who are terribly bored by a piece, but feel they cannot voice such a concern, perhaps because they do not yet have the capacity to point out why it is boring. Nevertheless, he says this "felt sense" is equally important if not more important than the development of specific criteria.

In reflecting again on my experience of reading the novel manuscript of Crows, *I now understand that I was responding to set criteria which were subconsciously dictating my comments. I probably used "teacherly" language because this is precisely the type of language that grows out of established criteria. As I neared the halfway mark of the novel, I wanted to go back and write comments which were "raw" in terms of what I was feeling and thinking as I read certain passages. My need to constantly explain myself gradually lessened as I enjoyed recording the "movie" of my mind.*

In past years I have told students that if they cannot explain why they think something, they probably do not have a valid point to present to the writer. Also, I rarely encouraged students to talk about their feelings as they read a piece. As I respond to the writing of people in my present writing group, however, I find myself doing the exact opposite of what I recommended, directly or indirectly, my students do. I would never think of holding back my genuine surprise, delight or concern, and I also feel comfortable describing my sense of the whole, the "felt sense" of the writing which may lack logical or rational explanation. While I still intend to use criteria-based response to help students develop specific skills and techniques, I now value another way of responding which is

perhaps more natural in that it emulates the reaction of the "real" reader of a text.

Elbow (1981) talks about reader-based feedback as being particularly necessary in fiction. Garry would agree; he uses rubrics for feedback and evaluation of student non-fiction, but refrains from doing so with fiction, which he believes could never be slotted into a few categories. Elbow (1981) similarly states, "There are so many different ways in which poems or stories can succeed -- or fail -- that it's impossible to spell out a list of specific criteria for them" (p. 249). Elbow also, however, is uncomfortable with using strict criteria for non-fiction; he notes that while he provides a list of criterion-based questions to help reader's respond to non-fiction, "Many successful pieces of non-fiction fail to meet some of these criteria... And many unsuccessful pieces measure up well on most criteria, but fail to have that certain something that makes them succeed with readers" (p. 250).

A few months ago, one of my former students, a brilliant, creative young woman, talked to me about her disappointment in receiving a 62% on the written portion of her diploma exam. I was quite surprised since this girl writes well under any conditions. Several weeks ago, her teacher told me that the mark had been appealed and was raised to a 92%. As I continue to write this thesis and reflect on responses to writing, I am beginning to suspect that such chasms exist because some teachers read strictly according to criteria (which is what they are told to do) and others include reader-based response in evaluating. I remember the girl as a stylistically creative writer, her work exploding with voice. Teachers do warn students to "play it safe" for the exam: "If your writing fails to conform to certain criteria, you won't be rewarded." I also suspect that exam markers are weary after reading many essays on the same topic. It becomes easier to miss the delightful elements other readers might see in the same piece. I wonder how often I have missed out on the joy of reading a well-crafted piece due to feeling fatigue -- how often I have quickly slotted the words of individuals into categories without responding as a reader, as a human being?

Elbow (1981) finds that criteria-based response is necessary when conducting final evaluations of writing which require many hours of his time: "It's nearly impossible to read a whole stack of papers in one sitting and react to each one fully, for itself, and on its own terms. It's much easier -- and perhaps even fairer in the long run -- to choose a manageable set of good criteria and apply them to each paper as you read it" (p. 244). However, he suggests that students may want to read a partner's piece by first using reader-based response before reading it again for specific criteria. I agree with Elbow that both types of response need to be incorporated in order to more fully help growing writers, but teachers need to consider using reader-based feedback more often when responding orally to writing. The teachers in this study have conversations with students which are largely reader-based. By conversing with students who are in the process of producing a piece, teachers can show them the effect of words on a "real" reader. As Marian and Glen say, students begin thinking like writers when you respond in this way.

Perhaps oral response is also significant because it seems to naturally encourage reader-based response. Prior to the process movement in the early and mid-1980s, many teachers responded to students' compositions primarily by writing on the final drafts of papers. Gere and Stevens (1985) note that in their studies of teacher and student response to writing, the formative oral response of students was much more effective than the summative written response of teachers:

> Group response is often intent on forming the text by informing it, that is, it tries to realize the meaning of the text by informing the writer of its actual and potential meaning for each listener. Group response thus may be said to have as much an interpretive as a formative function. In contrast, teacher comments may be said to attempt to form student writing by conforming it, that is, by trying to realize its potential similarity to a paradigm text by asking the writer to conform to certain abstract characteristics of "good" writing (p. 103).

In the L-Group, the writers are often asked questions after a discussion of their pieces. These questions allow them to have conversations with "real" readers, an actual audience, which helps heighten sensitivity to how others interpret and come to understand their product. Glen has student writers ask the first questions, mostly because the respondents then feel free to answer honestly and specifically, rather than "hiding behind praise and not really saying what's on their mind." I believe this technique also helps writers take more responsibility in reflecting on their strengths and potential areas for growth. However, Elbow (1973) warns that writers may ask questions which lead the respondents and help them along, rather than allowing them to give "movies" of their minds; he suggests if a particular kind of feedback is helpful to writers, then they could develop appropriate questions, but otherwise he advises them to merely listen. In Garry's feedback sessions, I witnessed some students listening to comments and then asking the group questions about whether a certain technique worked or not; the writers were aware of their own processes and received immediate, relevant feedback, while the readers were able to respond specifically and, as Garry says, learn from listening and talking to the writer. Similarly, when both the writer and reader have opportunities to ask questions and are encouraged to do so, a reflective culture evolves in which students learn more about the writing processes of themselves and others.

Garry and Glen also talk about oral sharing of writing as a way for individual writers to witness the strengths of others and hopefully learn from these strengths. Garry uses the example of a student in his creative writing class who at one time only wrote serious, solemn pieces, but is now experimenting with comedy after listening to her peers read pieces which shine with satire, understatement, and other techniques of humour. Glen notes that students need to hear and see what other writers are doing in order to learn from them. While other teachers experience peer sharing as resulting in a loss of creativity, since students are afraid to write anything different from what their friends are writing, none of the teacher-writers in this study made such a comment. They believe that anyone learning to create cannot fully develop without knowing what and how others are producing their creations.

Audience

All of the teacher-writers connect a sense of audience to the practice of reading their work aloud to others. They believe that when students have an opportunity to receive oral response to their work, audience awareness grows both in the writer and the peers who converse with them.

The teacher-writers talk about spontaneous reactions from an audience being important to their sense of whether a piece "works" or not. Kirby and Liner (1988) agree, saying that read alouds can provide response which is valuable because of its immediacy. Garry notes that when he shares his writing with students, he listens for signs which let him know whether or not a desired effect has been accomplished. He says, "If I have a funny scene, I'll read it to them and see if they laugh, and if they don't, then I know that it's not right, that I haven't done something right." Janeen recalls a student who received many chuckles from his audience while reading a humorous piece during a school function; she notes that "When you get an audience responding to your work like that, it's the kind of feedback writers often look for -- you know that you've achieved what you set out to do." Glen, Janeen and Marian mention the importance of being able to touch the audience with their writing, of knowing that their words cause reflection and genuine emotion. Spontaneous reaction to a piece is sometimes our greatest clue that the writing has succeeded or failed, since the internal censor in listeners has not had time to think about an "appropriate" reaction.

When the teachers read their polished work for large groups, they are even more sensitive to audience, as they select those pieces which people may comprehend after hearing the piece only once, and which evoke strong images that many people can relate to. However, all of the writers are more concerned with audience during and after composing first drafts of non-fiction such as articles and textbooks, than they are with writing in genres such as poetry. They note that often the non-fiction they write is directed at a very specific audience with specific wants and needs, whereas fiction, unless written for a particular age group like young adults or children, usually has a more general audience. Janeen states her opinions about writing poetry for others:

> I believe that poetry should have a wide audience, and this comes down to philosophical beliefs. I believe poems should be accessible, and that a good poem is playful; it plays with the language, and technique is important, but technique isn't everything. It hits people on an emotional level; it's something they can respond to. It's not sentimentality, but there's honest sentiment and there's something in it that makes a person say, "Yes, I've felt that before," or, "I've seen that before," and "Why didn't I just put it down that way?"

Glen took creative writing courses from Atwood and Wiebe, who taught him that honesty in writing comes from the writer's consciousness. Reflecting on their teachings, he notes,

> In poetry, the most difficult challenge is not to intellectualize the experience, but to write about the genuineness of experience in terms of the poem, so that poetry is something that is true to the consciousness of the poet, and he articulates it well and it becomes accessible bits of consciousness, accessible to readers. If one intellectualizes or gets too enamoured with the way in which poems work, then the language of the poem becomes contrived.... The genuineness of the experience that the consciousness is presenting becomes secondary to the vehicle instead of primary.

Glen relates an experience in which he stood to accept an award for a poem and was shocked listening to the presenter inform the audience that the poem was about the making of underground movies; it actually concerned a girl he knew who kept changing personalities because of a need to be perceived as interesting. After this experience, he firmly resolved to make his poems less esoteric and more clear and accessible to audiences. He, as well as the other teacher-writers, encourage students to try and write truthfully and genuinely, allowing the language to speak to an audience. Often students perceive a "good" poem to be one which is incomprehensible, one with "deep" meaning which contains a security

code that only the most intelligent of students (and of course, the teacher) can break. This belief appears to infiltrate other genres as well -- in particular, the essay. Mairs (1994) remembers trying to help her post-secondary composition class write a paper by showing them a model she wrote. She talks about this model as being typical of post-secondary writing:

> The structure of my piece was clear, the ideas were accessible, and the mechanics of documentation were correct, but the tone was all wrong, designed to baffle and discomfit the ordinary reader. Bafflement and discomfiture are much of the point, if not quite the whole of it, in the academy. The Haves and Have Nots of general society are paralleled there by the Knows and the Know Nots. The same principle of exclusion operates, but on a linguistic rather than a material basis (p. 29).

Students need to be shown models of teacher, peer and professional writing which celebrate clarity and simplicity. They need to be given the freedom to write from their own knowledge and experience and feeling, and to share that writing with an appreciative audience.

Some of the teacher-writers talk about the importance of providing students with a variety of audiences. Garry mentions the power of group sharing, in which the writer has a real audience which displays real thoughts and emotions. Marian has had students find issues which they object to and write letters of complaint to persuade companies or individuals to take a certain course of action. Elbow (1981) implies that writing for people other than the teacher produces more realistic conditions for the growing writer: "Writing for your teacher is like playing your violin for your violin teacher. It is a great help in learning to play the violin, but it is not the goal. The goal -- and thus the reason for getting the teacher's help in the first place -- is to play for yourself or for your friends or for a wider audience" (p. 223). Janeen and Glen talk about the power of affecting an audience with words, yet this power, Elbow maintains, will never be experienced by students if they simply write for the teacher. He believes genuine motivation to write can come

from exposing students to "real" audiences: "Writing as *action in the world* intensifies the relationship between you and the words you put down on paper" (p. 228). Calkins (1991) also believes in students writing for diverse audiences, as they are more apt to view their writing at a distance: "When writing is for books to be read, poems to be recited, songs to be sung, letters to be mailed -- when we can remember and imagine response -- we are more apt to write, and to read our writing, with an outsider's eyes, asking ourselves, 'What effect will this text create?'" (p. 112).

While Elbow and Calkins advocate writing for audiences other than the teacher, some of the teacher-writers in my study talk about the limits on their time in planning such occasions and in helping students seek out an audience. Because they do, however, give their students frequent opportunities to have an audience consisting of a friend, a small group, or an entire class, the negative effect of writing solely for the teacher is subdued. Since the teacher-writers also give students opportunities to compose in forms other than the literary critical essay, which is usually written for the teacher, the audience can be diverse. Elbow (1981) notes that in such forms as the essay, "the student pretends to explain something to someone who doesn't understand it; the teacher pretends to be this general reader reading for enlightenment" (p. 221). Consequently, the teacher as audience no longer exists, as the role lacks most of the functions and purposes of a real audience.

I can't help thinking of Elbow's belief in the pretend state both student and teacher are subject to. It seems so unnatural for students to have to constantly "prove" to teachers what they know instead of simply creating a piece that genuinely informs or entertains them. As a teacher, I remember most vividly students whose compositions taught me something about their interests, passions and beliefs. Conversely, I remember too the uncomfortable hours of reading one Hamlet *essay after another, essays that were painfully written and painfully read. I am not about to abandon asking students for responses to literature that demonstrate critical thinking, but what I do want to do is give them more opportunities to see me as a "real" audience, as a person who wants to and needs to know what they have to offer the world. I cannot become a*

member of the classroom community of writers otherwise. A naturalness must exist if I want to read writing that has life and spirit and conviction.

Although all of the teacher-writers believe that audience consideration is important for their students, I initially noticed a difference between their own disregard for audience when writing fiction and the advice they gave their students. However, I began reading the words of other published writers who also talk about both a concern and lack of concern for audience; William Zinsser clearly explains his own apparently contradictory advice about being wary of the impatient reader, but yet ultimately accepting that the writer writes for herself: "I'm talking about two different issues. One is craft, the other is attitude. The first is a question of mastering a precise skill. The second is a question of how you use that skill to express your personality" (p. 27). Zinsser goes on to explain that the writer has to work hard to develop style which influences audience, but that the initial process of creating and expressing are to be carried out without consideration of others' values, beliefs and preferences in writing. Margaret Laurence talks about her own experience with audience: "The first time... I don't think of anybody. I haven't got an audience, and I don't know what I'm going to discover. But once the first draft is done, I do think of potential readers, in the sense that I feel that I want to make things as clear and as effective as possible" (Murray, 1990, p. 38). The teacher-writers want their students to write honestly and without fear of a critical audience, yet when a draft is complete, they do begin addressing audience by talking with students about revision techniques which include style and clarity.

Voice

Glen and Janeen talk about students who lose their natural voice in writing , partly because they imagine an audience that wants them to sound intelligent. These students zealously rush to their dictionaries and thesauruses and create long sentences because they believe "big" words and "big" sentences are better. One student who was writing confusing, muddled pieces told Glen that he needed to write in this way because "writing is different from speech." Glen suggested, "Writing is as clear

as speech, with a little bit more control over it. You should be writing as you sound rather than writing as you think you should sound." Janeen asks her students to simply tell her what they really intended to say and once they do this, she asks them to record the words they uttered. Elbow (1994) advocates using qualities of speech in writing: "When words are easy to say, especially if they are characteristic of idiomatic speech, we tend to hear them more; when written words are awkward or unidiomatic for speech, we tend to hear them less" (p. 7). One helpful technique Glen has suggested to students is to read their writing into a tape-recorder as if they were giving a speech. This technique immediately performed wonders for one of his students, who realized for the first time what his writing sounds like to a reader and where he could revise to help the reader along. Bonni Goldberg (1996) also suggests that writers tape themselves reading a piece they are working on. In fact, she insists that the speaking voice is one of the best teachers a writer has, and that "the first and final revision technique for any type of creative writing is to read the piece out loud" (p. 55).

Macrorie (1985) suggests that in order to avoid what he calls "Engfish": pretentious, lifeless pieces that say nothing, students need to tell the truth -- no small task. He believes that "Any person trying to write honestly and accurately soon finds he has learned a hundred ways of writing falsely," (p. 16) giving examples of language shaped by peer pressure and a need to impress the teacher. While Glen and Janeen use dialogue to help students gain both clarity and honesty, Macrorie and Elbow (1981) advocate freewriting to break through censors which keep us lying to ourselves and keep us hooked on the fear of a critical, uncompromising, rule-oriented audience.

I suggest that much of the "Engfish" students produce is a direct result of what they perceive to be valuable in English language arts classrooms. They cannot be blamed for the bland products they churn out; their ideas of what writing must look like are largely based on what they are repeatedly told and what they repeatedly read within school walls.

The Beginnings of Engfish
(for K. Macrorie)

I feel
No first person pronouns. Omit "feel."
One might assume
Do not assume anything. Good use of "one."
The trajectory of the conspicuous dearth of the group members
Superb vocabulary!
The prediction could be made
Use fact only when talking about fiction.
The interpretation one has
Avoid use of "interpretation." Good use of "one."
It seems that she desperately needed
Avoid "seems" -- you want to portray confidence and knowledge of the subject.
She sat on the floor and cried.
Work on compound complex sentences (average 12.5 words per sentence).
And cried.
Fragment.

Marian and Garry talk about consciously helping students become aware of their own voices by noting where individual voice stands out in a given piece of writing. Marian tells her students that she wants to read writing that sounds like someone is talking to her, and when she finds this quality in their writing, she makes comments like, "I can really hear your voice coming through here. This sounds like you. This sounds like a real person talking." Her response echoes the words of Klaus (1994), who, when hearing the word "voice," is "naturally inclined to imagine a particular person, the author of the piece, talking or conversing, musing or reflecting -- giving voice to recollection and perception, thought and feeling, in an audibly distinctive way" (p. 111). Using the example of responding to a student's poem, Garry says, "When you see the voice come out in a couple lines of poetry, you zero in on that and say, 'I love this line because that's you, that's your voice. Look at that.'" Students

need such affirmations in order to become aware of their own voice and to be motivated to repeat and build on instances where this voice resounds with their individual personality.

Marian often begins a semester by asking students to compose a piece which is autobiographical in nature. She shares her stories involving people, places and emotions and gives students the chance to share their own stories in small and large group settings. Believing that personal stories allow voices to unfold, largely because students do not have to struggle with the development of ideas, Marian shows her students examples of biography and autobiography "where people tell their own stories." These excerpts serve as models for students writing in this form and give them permission to tell their own stories. Similarly, Zinsser (1994) illustrates the power of memoir, urging writing teachers to invite students to "believe in the validity of their own lives" (p. 97). When students know that their own stories are important to themselves and others, they can begin writing in a voice that is theirs at a particular moment in time.

Garry uses song lyrics to show students the difference between a strong voice and one that is "generic." He notes the cliches about love that some singers use, and contrasts them to strong, unique images. While Garry connects originality and voice, as do many other writers, Glen warns that teachers should accept some writing which may be unoriginal; the student who has limited experience in life and reading may not know what is unoriginal in the eyes of adults and widely-read students. Janeen laughed when telling me about the experience of reading some of her high school creative compositions; she had an urge to throw them out, since they sounded highly unoriginal, but they did make her more aware of how the narrow range of teenagers' life experience is inevitably revealed in much of their writing. Teachers need to recognize that response to writing that lacks originality and insight should not result in students feeling inadequate as writers.

Publishing

When people hear the word "publishing" they usually have images of words in print, bound in covers, boldly displaying titles, authors, and

publishers. However, as I interviewed the teacher-writers in this study, I discovered that their view of publishing was much more expansive. Glen defines it as "bringing your work to an audience." Atwell (1987) similarly notes, "It includes all of the ways a writer acquires readers beyond the writer and teacher" (p. 265). One method of publishing frequently mentioned by all of the teacher-writers involves providing opportunities for students to read their polished drafts aloud to classmates. Marian talks about the importance of publishing her own poems and articles by reading aloud to various audiences; she emphasizes that this method allows the writing to "get out to other people." When giving her own student-writers the same opportunity, she observes them enthusiastically read a piece of their choice to classmates who are attentive and respectful during these occasions. Romano (1987) and Rief (1992) have the same experience with their students, noting that what writers have to say affects listeners. Romano says, "Sometimes class members respond with appropriate laughter or brief comments of praise. And sometimes they sit respectfully silent. Written words move people in many ways" (p. 76).

Glen talks about publication as a way for all writing to be shared. He and the other teacher-writers use methods in which they include all student-writers in publication processes, rather than limiting the experience to a select few. Kirby and Liner (1988) and Graves (1983) advocate publishing that includes all students. Atwell (1987) maintains "It should not be an award bestowed on what we decide is "good" writing. If your class and school magazines are juried, with selections made by the teacher or the writer's peers, the students who most need response to finished pieces will never be published, and the same "good" writers will be published time and again" (p. 265).

Creating a class anthology is one way the teacher-writers help all students publish their work. The anthology Garry's creative writing class produces is a literary magazine called *Spice*, which was selected by the National Council for Teachers of English as one of the top eight student literary magazines in 1996 and rated numerous times as an above average magazine. Glen sometimes creates spontaneous, informal anthologies by asking students to compose a piece in a certain number of days to include in a class collection. In her own experience of observing students create a

class anthology, Janeen says that the community of writers is strengthened as individual students identify with the accomplishments of their particular class. Marian has students choose a few favourite pieces to include in their own individual anthologies, which are then bound using a Japanese book-binding method.

Other ways the teacher-writers publish student work is by displaying it on bulletin boards, mobile hangings, and in display cases in hallways. Janeen notes that many students are interested in the writing of their peers and do take time to read selections on classroom walls or other areas of the school. Marian has invited students to include writing which is placed in a binder that can then be signed out by others who wish to read it. Graves (1983) similarly encourages younger students to create their own books that can be signed out by others. He believes this contributes to a sense of audience, using the example of one child: "Kim will soon find that other children put their names on the checkout card in her book and make comments about the contents.... Later as children get older, they envision the appearance of a piece in print, and the teacher, parents or friends turning the pages" (p. 54).

The teacher-writers also provide opportunities for students to publish their work outside the classroom. They display and discuss writing contests and magazines that accept young writers' work, and also invite students to submit pieces to the school newspaper or yearbook. Garry talks about a sweatshop writing contest held annually in his school, where interested students write under sweatshop conditions and are awarded with medals. Having never been an athlete in school himself, Garry relates to the pride students have when receiving their very first medal.

While visiting Garry and Janeen's classrooms, I had the opportunity to witness a sense of accomplishment and celebration as student-writers read their work aloud to their classmates. I thought about the necessity of recognizing both the writing process and product through oral publication. Unfortunately, when I taught high school, I often convinced myself of the shortage of time for such activities, and as a result, rarely invited students to read. Romano (1987) reminds me that I cannot afford not to make time:

> English classes are often sedate places when it comes to students writing. Students hand in papers; teachers comment upon them, hand them back, move on to the next assignment. There is no passion, no triumphant celebration of success and accomplishment. The sad part is that when students work at writing as a process, they succeed in hundreds of ways -- all worthy and significant, all deserving of sharing and celebrating (p. 75).

Romano's comments invite my reflection, indeed, beg my reflection. After meeting with my writing group several times, I began to think about our sharing of writing not only as an opportunity for feedback, but also as a celebration of the act of putting pen to paper. As I write my thesis, I am daily reminded that writing is not easy, that creation involves internal struggles as much as it does joy. I have persisted through doubts and trepidation, through many of the hundreds of psychological resistances available to humans as we are about to write. When I return to teaching, I want to open the doors of space and time so that writers may recognize the great achievement of creating words where there were none before: spinning a web of words, weaving a basket of images, stitching a quilt of ideas in a pattern only they could imagine and create.

Grammar and Mechanics

Marian and Garry explain to students that learning the conventions of writing is important in the sense that the writer needs to be able to communicate clearly with the reader. This reasoning is connected to an awareness of audience and publishing. Kirby and Liner (1988) maintain that "Publishing is the only reason for the writing to be important enough for the hard work of editing and proofreading" (p. 237). Garry shows his students how he goes about editing prior to publishing, and Glen talks about the final stages of preparing for publication. He explains that all writers including professionals have their work edited. These discussions and models reinforce the importance of creating clear prose or poetry

and help students see that it is acceptable to make convention errors and later correct them, as Garry notes.

Prior to completing final drafts for publication, students usually submit their work to teachers. If a draft is in early stages, the teacher-writers focus on content and tend not to worry about conventions. Glen says students are relieved to know they don't have to worry about conventions as they work on other elements of writing such as content. Garry states,

> People get hung up on grammar and they get hung up on spelling. Look at the message first. There are all sorts of techniques to improve your spelling. No one is more embarrassed by poor spelling than a person who has trouble spelling. And they want to find out how to fix that, but they'll turn off when that's all you notice.

In my own classes, I ask students to comment on themselves as writers early in a semester. Inevitably, most of them see themselves as poor writers simply because they feel they cannot spell or "do grammar." While many of these students are capable writers, the message they retain over years of schooling is that conventions are more important than any other aspects of writing. Telling students this isn't so does not help. Showing them through oral and written response that what they say matters first and foremost does influence their perceptions.

Marian says that when students are ready to have their writing edited for conventions, they ask her. She notes the difference between this student-led action and a teacher-imposed one:

> I find a really good way around "my paper's bleeding syndrome" is that I hardly ever write on kids' papers, and if I do I'll ask for their permission. Some of them will want that, and I'll say to them, "Would you like me to help you find the errors in here?" And most of them will say, "Oh yeah, I would."
>
> "Well how do you want me to treat those? Do you want me to just put a little tick in the margin? Do you want

> me to circle them? Do you want me to underline them? What would you like me to do?"
>
> And then a lot of them will say, "Well would you please circle them?"
>
> "Yes I can do that. I can help you do that."
>
> And then you're helping them; you're not saying, "Look at how many errors you made."

Similarly, Glen talks about students who ask him to help with editing, and as he does he tries to use checkmarks or brackets in respect of the writer's property, rather than slashing words or imposing his own text on or over the writer's. He also has students engage in peer editing techniques which are unobtrusive, such as numbering errors down the left margin. The teachers all talked about helping students individually when the need to learn a certain convention arises. Garry reasons, "You've got ten kids in the class that know [the convention] already and don't need to learn it again, so why teach it to all of them?" If the teachers, however, notice the re-occurence of a particular error in the writing of a class or a large group, they do teach a mini-lesson and contextualize it by having students apply it in their own writing.

In terms of peer editing, Janeen and Glen help students edit work in small groups by giving each student a certain task. For instance, one student may look for apostrophes and spelling errors, while another student focuses on comma splices and fragments. Janeen finds that students are not overwhelmed and can do a much better job of editing overall when they are required to look for only one or two types of errors. Glen believes that editors, no matter how skilful, should not be expected to look for all errors on a first reading. Because students are growing writers, they have more confidence and success in their own editing abilities if teachers allow them to learn one or two conventions at a given time.

Self-Assessment

The teacher writers all believe self-assessment to be crucial in their own writing processes as well as those of their students. They talk about

the necessity of stepping back from their writing and viewing it as a reader. Janeen discusses the value of writing one of her poems on a board and examining it, asking herself why she chose to include different techniques and particular words and phrases. By transferring her poems to a different physical space, she is better able to create distance necessary to read as a reader, not as a writer. Glen notes, "When you read your own writing as a reader, you've distanced yourself and are reading it as a reading experience, rather than as a writing task. And as a reader, you have more capacity to judge whether or not the piece works in terms of content and purpose and audience." Some of the teacher-writers note that students often have great difficulty distancing themselves from their writing because they have put much of themselves, intellectually and emotionally, into their piece. In fact, many adult writers have the same difficulty, as Singer points out: "The main rule of a writer is never to pity your manuscript. If you see something is no good, throw it away and begin again. A lot of writers have failed because they have too much pity. They have already worked so much, they cannot throw it away. But I say the wastepaper basket is a writer's best friend. My wastepaper basket is on a steady diet" (Murray, 1990, p. 187).

All of the teacher-writers say that leaving their writing for a few days seems to help them gain the distance necessary to revise without "pity." Glen says he tries to provide similar conditions for students by assigning a piece to be completed within a couple of weeks. Janeen talks about writing folders being useful for the same reason; students usually have six weeks to complete them, in which time they can begin working on a new piece and re-visit earlier ones a few days later. Bonni Goldberg (1996) tells writers that taking time away from a piece "allows you to reabsorb what you discovered in the first draft, and to contemplate the discoveries made through the *process* of writing." She goes on to say that writers can then "approach the next stage focused and with the first inch of objectivity necessary to begin crafting" (p. 191).

One way the teachers help students achieve necessary distance in their writing is by encouraging peer conversations about drafts in progress. By receiving feedback from several peer writers, students are better able to evaluate their writing as a reader -- to see with fresh eyes.

Janeen says that her experience with the feedback of other writers in creative writing courses helped her develop as a reader of her writing:

> I think that's where I really started to grow as a writer and learn how to edit my own work more critically. I learned how to listen to other people's reactions to my own work and learned how to say, "That's a valid reaction," and, "No, "I'm trying to do something else here, so I'm not going to change this."

Janeen's own assessment of other people's reactions parallels her students' practice of examining peer suggestions and stating why they decided, as writers, to incorporate these suggestions or not. Marian points out that feedback can also have the effect of promoting a more positive attitude toward the writing, since many writers at times become disillusioned with a piece. When writers realize a piece has at least some of the qualities they have set out to achieve, they are more likely to begin revising or writing a new piece with renewed excitement and confidence.

Glen and Janeen have students use criteria which can be used for both peer and self-assessment of writing. When pieces have been looked at by the student writers as well as their peers, they are far more likely to revise the piece. Calkins (1991) believes that writers who reflect and think critically learn to revise their writing beyond surface skills:

> Learning to develop a piece has less to do with learning to insert information with arrows, carets and editing codes or with learning to write longer drafts than it has to do with learning to explore hunches, to interrogate images and ideas, and to follow trails of thought and chains of memory. Texts become well developed and alive not so much when writers say more as when they learn more (p. 274).

Revision can indeed be a process of interrogation, but, as Marian and Janeen note, it is also a playful process; it need not lead a writer to one solution, but can allow many possibilities to unfold. Bernard Malamud said, "I work with language. I love the flowers of afterthought" (Murray, 1990, p. 184). When students are immersed in a reflective

culture, they have more opportunities to see revision as a chance to play with and manipulate language, rather than being its slave or relying on "the answer" from "the expert."

Because the teacher-writers involve their students in continued self and peer assessment, they are more likely to begin developing the independent critical skills professional writers use as they play with drafts. Glen notes, however, that effective assessment of writing takes time to develop and requires an active role on the part of teachers:

> Bloom's taxonomy puts evaluation at the top, as one of the highest levels, and the capacity to evaluate automatically assumes that there's a background in the evaluator, that he or she has a certain set of skills developed and a certain amount of reading. The person who has never read and comes to read an article has no basis on which to make a judgement about that article because he or she doesn't have the critical frames of reference. The more we can give them the background experience in the critical frames of reference, the better we can increase their capacity to evaluate and savour.

Gardner (1996) advocates self-assessment as an integral process in developing intelligence. He would strongly promote the process and product assessment the teacher-writers have their students do, since he believes "assessment is to be ongoing, to take place regularly as a seamless part of the curriculum" (p. 260).

After polishing their writing, the students of the teacher-writers are often involved in reflecting on a single product, writing folder, or portfolio. Janeen sometimes asks students to include a letter with a writing folder or two pieces of writing, which requires reflection on the strengths of a piece they feel is their best work, and reasons for having difficulties in the process of completing particular pieces. Sometimes she asks students to explain why one piece is superior to another, and which piece they would prefer her to evaluate and why. Similarly, Calkins (1994) suggests that students be encouraged to reflect on what they have

learned from writing a piece or a folder of pieces and identify what they might do differently another time.

Marian, Garry and Janeen talk about portfolios as a useful method in helping students reflect on writing done over several weeks or an entire semester; students can examine earlier works and compare them to later ones. Glen maintains that portfolios invite even more reflective practice than writing folders, because students only include pieces that best demonstrate their writing abilities, which requires them to think about the qualities of good writing. He notes that a portfolio "chronicles the learning journey, the development of the writer as a writer, and it exemplifies the best of the writer's work." Garry asks students to keep all of their writing in a folder and at the end of the year, or semester, look through pieces to celebrate their achievement. This act of celebration also causes moments of reflection, as students comment on the positive aspects of their writing.

Instead of a traditional year-end examination of writing skills, Marian asks her students to reflect on themselves as writers. She asks them to choose one or two quotes by famous writers which parallel or are foreign to their own experiences as writers, or explain and demonstrate how they have developed their writing. If her students feel they have not grown as writers over the course of a semester, they can choose to write about that instead. Similarly, Calkins (1994) uses Elbow's (1981) portraits of different writers to suggest that student-writers compose portraits of themselves, "If they want to show how their writing strategies have changed over time" (p. 244).

Some of the teacher-writers involve students not only in the formative assessment of writing, but also in the summative evaluation of it. Garry dialogues with students to reach an agreement about a grade. Janeen often asks for a written reflection of a grade a student believes is appropriate. Janeen and Marian have students create the criteria for writing folders developed over several weeks. Sanford (1997) maintains students gain a sense of power and ownership over their work when given "the means, the skills, and the opportunity to assess their own writing according to the value system and criteria that the instructor and students generate together as an interpretive community" (p. 156). If students must have their writing numerically assessed every few weeks, then

teachers must involve them in the construction of criteria and in reflecting on a possible grade through oral and written means. True community cannot be formed otherwise.

Glen works with students to develop rubrics written in their own language, a language they can understand. Sanford (1997) notes that in her own classroom, "The development of a common language and vocabulary for discussing each other's work enabled a community of learners to develop" (p. 229). Not only do students benefit from talking to each other about criteria for assessment, but teacher-student conversations become more effective when they use a common language. Students feel more confident and relaxed talking naturally than conversing artificially by using "adult" language.

Many times teachers assume that students understand criteria descriptions and labels that they or external agencies create. For instance, some teachers find the Alberta English 30 diploma exam marking guide to be useful in helping students understand criteria for literary critical essays. However, this language is not "kid" language. Students often feel intimidated by it and are quite uncertain as to what the words really mean, as I discovered when talking to my own English 30 students last year. Yes, teachers can spend time interpreting the descriptors and clearing a path toward understanding, but perhaps we need to consider allowing students to use this time to create similar criteria for particular forms and genres -- ***in their own words****. How many students really understand, for instance, this 1996 Alberta English 30 diploma exam descriptor (five on a five-point scale) for the writing skills category of the minor assignment?*

> *The writing is skillfully structured and fluent. Diction is appropriate and effective. Syntax is controlled and varied. The relative absence of errors is impressive under the circumstances, and minor errors do not detract from the clarity or effectiveness of communication.*

The importance of reflection in schools cannot be overestimated. We need to build a culture of thoughtfulness (Gardner, 1996, p. 263) in

which students learn how to reflect on and assess their own writing, thinking and learning. Sanford (1997) believes "The system of evaluation we employ in schools does not provide opportunities for teachers or for students to become independent learners and thinkers" (p. 153). The teacher-writers in this study are beginning to open much needed space that resists the non-thinking culture of schools and society at large. Gardner (1996) notes that his colleague, Perkins, has proposed a "metacurriculum": a curriculum "centred on reflection that helps students think about their own thinking and about thinking in general" (p. 263). By making time and space for meta-cognitive activity, writing teachers will help build a community of reflective, independent thinkers and writers.

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In responding to writing, teachers have the opportunity to model for students the possibilities for re-visioning a piece. Because the teacher-writers are experienced in revising and assessing their own work, they are better able to help students evaluate their compositions and writing skills. As the students' capacity to assess their writing evolves, they are empowered by making their own choices in shaping compositions, which can result in a sense of ownership and pride. They begin to see themselves as writers capable of independent creation. This, ultimately, is a writing teacher's goal.

Chapter 5
Working With and Against Constraints

> Becoming awake is not easy. It is hard. It is a long quiet highway.... Our life is the path of learning, to wake up before we die.
>
> Natalie Goldberg

In trying to cope with frantic schedules and increasing workloads, teachers may develop a passive, accepting or even apathetic attitude toward education and the welfare of students. Throughout the interviews and observations of the teacher-writers, however, I observed them to be introspective, constantly searching for conditions which enhance the growth of student-writers. Because of their reflective and observant nature, they also discussed in detail their perceptions of impediments to student success in writing. All keenly felt, directly or vicariously through their students, some of the external blocks which inhibit their own writing and their students' writing. Their frustrations are sometimes alleviated by their own ingenuity in teaching, but at other times their voices demand change, inviting other teachers to join them on the long, quiet highway of resistance.

Diploma Exams

The one impediment to student growth in writing discussed more than any other was the provincial diploma exams. While most of the participants note the exam's usefulness in certain respects, such as setting standards and reinforcing clarity of communication, all of them are uncomfortable with its format and the implied messages it sends high school students and their teachers.

While the participants each commented on different repercussions of the exam, they all expressed concern over the narrow range of writing represented in it. In the 1997 Part A form of the English 30 exam, for example, students respond to a piece of literature (but not in a personal

way), and in Part B they write a literary critical essay on the topic given, using literature of their choice. Some of the teachers note that Part A has, in essence, become a miniature Part B in the last few years. Janeen points out that most students will not be writing essays in their adult lives; Marian agrees, adding that students are more naturally drawn to personal narrative and fictional forms: "Kids, given the choice, would never choose [the critical essay]. They want to write stories. I don't know many writers whose first choice is critical essays. They write novels, they write plays, they write poetry, they write short stories, but they don't write critical essays. The only place the animal exists is in academia." Garry similarly questions the exclusion of genres and forms. He notes,

> Language is a powerful tool for communication. But it can communicate more than meaning. It can communicate to us in ways which make us think and wonder and feel.... We are neglecting the language's very real talents for making us into a better society in our rush to prepare for the exam. In other words, we are neglecting the "heart" and the "intellect" in our desire to tend to the business of passing the exam.

McNeill (1990) interviewed four teachers and a senior staff member of the Alberta Student Evaluation Branch, Department of Education, to gain their perspective on the purpose, usefulness and drawbacks of the exam. The participant from the Evaluation Branch maintains that the exam "has grown out of the present (1982) High School Language Arts Curriculum" (p. 7). However, the exam is derived from a small portion of the curriculum, which may result in an over-emphasis on the teaching of particular sets of skills. Marian firmly states that the narrow representation of students' abilities portrayed in an exam which focuses on one genre, one form, leads to teachers feeling uneasy about asking students to write in other genres and forms which may or may not be focused on a response to literature. Not only do teachers limit the genre and form, but they often limit the types and choice of topics assigned. One of the teachers in McNeill's study admitted to repeatedly assigning topics similar to the departmental exam because of his belief

that students would then perform better on the exam. Marian notes that when the exams were re-instituted in 1984, teachers insisted that they would continue teaching in the same way and would refuse to be influenced by the exam. However, Marian herself admits that the longer she taught high school after this point, the more the exams began to encroach upon her teaching.

I know personally what Marian is talking about. After teaching junior high for several years, I was determined to continue using practices which gave students choice and ownership over their writing. However, as I began to look through past exams, a feeling of panic slowly seeped into my subconscious, causing abrupt explosions of anger whenever I thought students were not achieving to their potential. I would shout, "You people have an exam in three months. An exam worth fifty percent of your year's mark!" Sadly, I said this more for my own benefit than theirs. I did not want colleagues or any imagined and real Big Brothers to be disappointed. Worried that I might fail to be seen as accountable to these people, I was not accountable to the people who needed and deserved accountability: the thirty-two bodies furiously writing their literary critical essays.

Prior to teaching English 30, I naively presumed teachers were not strong enough to really be themselves and follow their own beliefs about what good teaching is. Now I see all too clearly the powerful force the exams have on the practice of many teachers. I've often read that external exams promote questionable practice. In my case, it did. I later felt I had betrayed myself and my students. I now wonder how many other teachers share my experiences and painful memories....

Glen, Janeen and Garry talk about feeling a sense of obligation to their students, whose marks in English 30 may determine whether or not they get into university and are awarded scholarships. Janeen notes that her English 30 students ask her to focus on exam preparation; only a few mention wanting to write in other forms. However, as a department head, Janeen meets with other English teachers who share writing assignments and models that encourage the expansion of curriculum beyond essay writing and response to reading. She also notes that she

focuses on exam preparation close to the end of a semester or at the end of units of study, rather than allowing it to dictate the English 30 or 33 curriculum.

Marian talks about starting a course with writing that students can do, rather than asking them repeatedly to engage in something they can't do. She finds other ways in which her students show her "what it is they know about literature, how they understand things." Believing that there are many ways for students to develop critical thinking and reading without constantly writing essays, she gives them opportunities, like Romano (1987), to write in dialogue journals or response journals, to create fictitious pieces based on a reading, and to talk in groups about the reading. She concludes that if students do not write effective literary critical essays, it is almost always due to a fault in thinking processes, not in the format of the piece. When students are in the habit of reading and thinking critically, Marian notes, it is not difficult for them to make a transition to an essay format.

Glen and Janeen state that the exam is tailored to the type of writing students will be expected to do in many post-secondary programs. However, Janeen says that while post-secondary students do need to be critical thinkers and write literary critical essays, they rarely, if ever, are asked to write on one topic. As an undergraduate student, I never encountered an exam which did not give students at least three topics to choose from.

Proponents of the exam argue that the question is so general that students could all think of something to say, but this is often not the case, as Marian points out. I know of many fine writers who, frustrated, sit with blank expressions and motionless pens after reading an exam topic. For them, the exam does not grant the opportunity to show what they can do. Proponents also say giving students choices would not be conducive to accurate evaluation, since one topic is always bound to be more fruitful for most writers than others. So what? Who is this exam for? Markers, the government, the public? Should students not have the right to choose a topic they know will lead them to good results? Are we afraid of good results? Or are we indeed saying that a standard cannot be achieved if more than one topic is given? If this is the case, will teachers with

writing workshop classrooms or classrooms that encourage the use of writing folders and portfolios no longer be supported? Were they ever supported?

Some of the other negative effects of the exam were mentioned by individual teachers. Glen notes that it does not value or promote a sense of discovery or surprise so integral to the writer's delight in the act of creation. It is in discovery that writers often find their individuality, voice, and unique, creative ideas and ways of expressing themselves. Garry believes that, instead of encouraging the individual self to emerge through writing, the exam promotes "little machines" who must all "behave" a certain way. He also maintains that the exam often does not encourage "real thinking." I agree in that real thinking requires that students have permission to develop interpretations without fear of failure. They find hundreds of ways of discovering what the "authorities" think about the literature in hopes of "sounding intelligent" when writing. In the end, they do little more than reiterate someone else's thoughts about literature selected for the exam. Surely, this practice cannot be said to promote independent thinking, a quality many post-secondary institutions expect from freshmen students. Instead, such exams reinforce in students the belief that their own thoughts are irrelevant, that they must seek knowledge and wisdom externally, rather than searching internally.

Janeen emphasizes that if teachers are to help students develop their writing processes throughout a semester or year, then students should have the opportunity to use those processes to the best of their ability in an exam situation. She believes that the exam does not teach kids to revise in a reflective, thorough way, and that it fails to teach them "how long to leave an idea, how to let it incubate, how to develop the self-discipline, how to set goals for yourself." Garry similarly states, "Writing takes time, thought and revision. The exam does not allow for any of these." One of the teachers in McNeill's study (1990) was concerned about the mixed messages teachers are given regarding process and product: "If you look at the final exam, it's quite clear that it's a product orientation. So right now as things stand it's very ambiguous because you've got the message that process is good but the exam is really

geared toward product" (p. 35). Calkins (1994) believes assessment measures are authentic only if they "Grow out of and reflect our values and plans, our students' values and plans," and "Grow out of and are woven into the very fabric of the school day" (p. 334). External exams do none of these things, and I believe it is time we re-examine the format and even the existence of such an exam. Janeen says that the exam does not "teach kids to love writing." What better justification for change?

Re-Visioning Diploma Exams

All of the teacher-writers believe that the diploma exam is "here to stay," and that teachers do need to recognize its existence, but they note that the format of such an exam could be altered for the students' benefit. Marian would like to see the exam "make more space for kids." One way she suggests doing this is by giving students "a choice of topic rather than having them all write to the same prompt." She worries that lack of choice combined with the dynamics of a multiple choice reading exam tells kids, "Here's the cookie cutter. If you don't fit the cookie cutter, you're out."

Both Janeen and Marian believe a personal response to literature should be included in the exam, since it allows students to show their understanding in different ways. Janeen says, "Anything I have read has shown that if students respond to a piece of literature first, or if they write something personal first and think through their ideas on a personal level, then you get much more sophisticated writing on a critical, analytical level." She also notes that this form of writing allows students to demonstrate what they can do stylistically. Glen, similarly, advocates the inclusion of an opinion piece because students "could use quite a range of style in order to do that." Janeen questions whether the exam shouldn't consider functional and creative writing. She asks, "If we're giving creative writing a backseat because we have to focus on the exam and the results, is that what we want to do provincially?"

The member of the Evaluation Branch interviewed by McNeill (1990) says some teachers ask if students can submit portfolios in place of writing the exam. She speculates, "I wonder how sincere that really is if

a teacher wanted to subject her students' work, or would invite a student to subject her work, to a group of markers who are strangers" (p. 9). I certainly would feel more comfortable submitting a portfolio which represents my best work completed during the course of a semester -- much more comfortable than sitting for three hours in a gymnasium writing as quickly as I can, praying to churn out something of value with the one chance I have to "prove myself." The same person then goes on to say that arriving at a standard for portfolios would be much too complex. Too complex or too time consuming, too expensive? Marian's words about policy-makers failing to do what is good for students continues to haunt me as I see money, time, and uniformity valued above students' growth as writers and as human beings.

Time

> To attain knowledge, add things every day. To attain wisdom, remove things every day.
>
> Lao-tse

Some of the teacher-writers note that the demands of the provincial exams leave teachers feeling that they do not have any time to devote to addressing various forms and genres. They also state that even in the absence of exams, curriculums are so expansive that teachers feel permanently rushed and fatigued. Glen says, "I'm constantly at war with myself over covering ground versus actual teaching. I think it's too easy to fall into the trap of covering the course and feeling good about having covered the course at the expense of actual involvements in teaching and writing." Glen later notes that literary analysis takes time to develop, but he believes "we could drop some material and some of the obligations to spend as much time as we do in favour of thirty to forty-five percent on writing." Calkins (1994) would agree, saying that "Sometimes I think that if we, as teachers, want to move on, we need to take carloads of curricula to the dump. It is only by cleaning out some old things that we can give time and space to new ones" (p. 187). Bomer (1995) recognizes that teachers have many pressures, both internal and external, which may never be satisfied, but he believes "Teaching is full of choosing, and so

we make up our minds about what is most essential about literacy and then work *only* there (p. 15).

All of the teacher-writers emphasize the necessity of giving students in-class time to write in order to develop a community of writers who work together through problems and celebrate successes. Teachers can respond best to student writing orally, and consequently must use class time to do this. As Marian says, relationships are built around conversations and writing together, which leads naturally to risk-taking or "the turtle coming out of its shell." If curriculum does not "get covered," perhaps there are opportunities for the more important uncovering of real writers writing and conversing within a genuine community. We need to follow what, in our hearts, we believe to be true. Perhaps then, like Marian, we will know first-hand and have courage to declare that "Important learning happens in the spaces between things sometimes."

Not only do we need to allow time for students to write, but as teachers, we need to allow ourselves the space to write too. All of the teacher-writers note that when students are writing first drafts in class, they write too. However, some of them find it difficult to write effectively until they are alone physically or mentally, for more than a few minutes at a time. Janeen and Marian talk about the difficulty of leaving daily concerns behind in order to write. Marian says teachers' minds become filled not only with school issues, but also with the texts they are constantly reading. Brande (1934) similarly believes writing is much more difficult to do well when the texts of others consume the mental space our own thoughts need in order to be recorded.

Glen and Garry write during times when their own lives and the world at large is quiet. Glen says he writes between 8:00 and 11:00 p.m. because he tends to get few phone calls or visitors between these hours, and is normally finished with his obligations for the day. Garry gets up early in the morning and arrives at school at least an hour before others in order to write in a peaceful, quiet environment and state of mind. Janeen sets aside certain hours to write on Sundays and holidays when she is free of distractions and her house is serene. Marian continues to search for satisfying times to write, noting that she finds the discipline of setting hours too burdensome for her own lifestyle.

Glen notes that as students get older, they find writing in classrooms increasingly difficult; they too need to find a place and time of their own. Teachers need to share their own strategies for finding places and times to write and encourage students to take time away from the hectic, everyday lives they lead to hear and record inner thoughts. However, for those students who, due to personal circumstances, are unable to do this, a safe quiet classroom may indeed be a welcome place to create.

Despite the difficulties of finding time to write, the teacher-writers all report a mental and physical sense of well-being when they do engage in the act of writing. Rico (1983) explains this phenomenon as resulting from an interaction between the left-brain and the right-brain hemispheres, which she calls Sign mind and Design mind, respectively:

> Brain-research findings richly substantiate many writers' intuitive recognition that the most creatively successful and productive writers are aware of two separate "selves," each of which makes its own unique contribution to natural writing. Framing this assertion in the brain terminology of today, the original vision of your Design mind -- once it becomes accessible -- is formed into something that can communicate beyond itself by the verbal sequencing capabilities of your Sign mind. In so doing, Roger Sperry noted, an actual physiological harmony occurs as the brain's diverse strengths work together. The reward of such cooperation is a psychological sense of wholeness. Herein lies our need and yearning for creative activity (p. 87).

When provided with conditions which allow them to work with their two writing selves or two hemispheres, thereby experiencing a sense of well-being, students might be more willing to search for their own places and spaces conducive to creating.

Class Size

The number of students per class has been rising steadily over the last few years, causing great concern amongst English language arts teachers. The teacher-writers note that both students and teachers are suffering. Janeen talks about the difficulty of having meaningful conversations in a class of thirty-five or forty; teaching individuals to effectively revise and edit is one of her great challenges. She would prefer to join writers in a feedback circle consisting of no more than fifteen students, rather than having to move quickly amongst many small groups, never staying long enough to become immersed in conversations. Glen says that teachers often ask students for fewer pieces and a narrow range of forms because they simply cannot read and then respond to one hundred and twenty pieces every few days. Marian notes that the number of students high school teachers must respond to takes its toll over months and years, and causes high stress levels and teacher burnout.

The teacher-writers attempt to cope with large class sizes by asking students to choose final drafts for assessment from a selection of pieces, and by taking in writing folders which have had oral response to drafts and therefore require few written comments. However, the lack of quality and quantity of oral response due to class size is a constant source of dissatisfaction for many teachers. Rief (1992) says, "Until we reduce the number of students to a manageable size (four classes of no more than twenty students each), we will seldom be able to individualize our curriculums to meet the needs of the diverse children we have in our classrooms" (p. 131). We need to begin collectively voicing our concerns if we as a society are seriously committed to quality education for student-writers *and* quality lives for teacher-writers.

Grades

Marian talks about grades negatively affecting the relationship between students and teachers. She says that often high school students of the "ninety-percent mentality don't want to tell you that they're not sure about something or that they're tentative about something." Because these students are often driven externally to succeed -- by university

scholarships, parents, and society in general, they view teachers as either a means to an end or as an obstacle in their path to "perfection." The relationship is one that is characterized by dishonesty and driven by fear; these students will not write or say anything which puts them in a vulnerable or compromising position. Both Janeen and Marian talk about times when a student writes something solely to please the teacher; while it may be quality writing in every other way, the tone rings false and is void of honest sentiment.

Some of the teacher-writers believe grades have a negative impact on students' creativity in writing. When grades become an obsession, students are hesitant to experiment and see things in different ways, believing they have too much to lose by doing so. Marian says that students who have high marks tend to imply, "When you're asking me to take a risk, you're asking me to try something that I don't do very well. Why would anybody in their right mind do that?" In studies of factors which impact creativity, Amabile (1983) concludes that "Extrinsic constraints can contribute to uncreative performance in two ways. They can divert attention away from the task itself and task-relevant aspects of the environment by directing attention to progress toward the extrinsic goal. And they can make the individual reluctant to take risks, since those risks might impede attainment of that goal" (p. 100). Conversely, students who do not have high marks and who are not striving for scholarships or other external gratification tend to be more willing to take risks. Glen says, "I find some of my students who are least concerned about marks write some of the freshest and most vivid poetry that I've ever seen, because they are not overly concerned about giving me what they think I want."

Garry notes that writing for marks affects students adversely "because they're writing for all the wrong reasons." Marks do not lead to an intrinsic love for writing, nor do they compel students to create outside of school obligations. They also affect peer relationships in classrooms, as Garry points out when saying that marks cause negative competition between students. He believes that as individuals, "we need to work together, but we don't need to compete against each other." He goes on to say that competition derived from marks "works against a positive healthy attitude where people work together in order to

accomplish something and recognize each other's strengths in getting that goal done." In order to build a true community of writers within the classroom, such competition must be lessened. Teachers can discourage it externally to some extent by not comparing writing and displaying marks, but the students themselves need to value their own work and individuality intrinsically, assessing their own growth instead of comparing individual marks with peers.

Tchudi and Mitchell (1989) believe "Grades induce a false competitiveness in many children, producing students skilled at playing the grading game and unskilled at meeting the more substantial goals of education" (p. 384). The metaphor of the game in education persists solely because of grading. The game involves doing whatever is necessary to achieve an "acceptable" mark; the game supresses the natural human desire to learn. Nachmanovitch (1990) believes that "Play, creativity, art, spontaneity, all these experiences are their own rewards and are blocked when we perform for reward or punishment, profit or loss" (p. 45). In order for students to be fully involved in and find joy in writing, the concept of grading may need to be abolished or revised in some way.

Attempting to combat some of the negative impact of grades on students' attitudes toward writing, teachers, and peers, the teacher-writers grant anxious students some relief by allowing space for "mistakes" during writing. They allow students to abandon pieces or rewrite them, and often use portfolios and writing folders which encourage students to risk more of themselves in the writing since each draft they produce does not have to "count." Glen and Marian suggest that teachers might also include rubrics which focus on risk-taking and experimentation. While this is an external motivator, and therefore less desirable than intrinsic motivation, Amabile (1983) notes that when students are encouraged to be creative and are shown how to increase their creativity, results of studies do show positive advancements in their creative activity. When students are worried about marks because they have been unsuccessful in the past, Glen converses individually with them and guarantees they will pass if they actually complete the assignments. Marian often gives these types of students completion grades -- full marks, if they choose to complete certain assignments. If a student does not have a polished product ready

for submission, she includes drafts in progress as part of a grade for a term.

Sanford (1997) talks about creating assessment criteria with her students which, instead of corresponding to a particular mark, include general categories such as "incomplete," "acceptable," and "superior." Prior to submitting grades for report cards, she gathers assessed work and converses with each student to agree upon a mark. While she admits that students initially resisted the absence of marks on individual assignments, they eventually focused more on their own growth and learning and less on comparing numbers and percentages. Tchudi and Mitchell (1989) discuss nongraded systems such as a pass-fail plan or a portfolio which is assessed by both students and teachers. Assessed, not graded. They note that evaluation of student work can be helpful, but "the difficulty enters in when a single symbol -- the grade -- is allowed to stand for a wide range or students' performances in class" (p. 387). They, like Sanford, suggest that if teachers use portfolios or a non-traditional system of evaluation, they need to explain to students their philosophy of evaluation and personal views of learning. Students need to understand teachers' beliefs about what promotes genuine growth; otherwise, resistance to change is even more likely.

Marian notes that despite some of the solutions to evaluating numerically, she struggles with its existence because in marking, a standard is assumed for a particular grade and age:

> "At the end of grade eleven, you are supposed to be able to do this, this and this." Well who says? Because you're sixteen years old, who says that you ought to be able to do this, this and this? Maybe you'll be able to do it when you're eighteen, maybe you'll be able to do it when you're twelve. And we pay a lot of lip-service to taking kids where they are, but we don't do it. Because they are of a certain age, we expect them to be at a certain point, and that's not realistic.

Marian concludes by saying that as a result of standards, she constantly attempts to balance grading with how much a student has grown and

learned. Rief (1992) similarly expresses her concern with standards by noting the actions she would like to take as a teacher:

> I want to do away with grades on the individual pieces of writing and in logs. I want to sit down with each student and take a look together at the working folder of works in progress, the portfolio of finished pieces, the reader's-writer's log, the reading list, and the student's self-evaluation. I want to look at goals set, and goals achieved. I want to base the grade on attitude, effort, growth, and "good faith participation" (p. 131).

If a grade must be given, Rief's categories, which value individual growth over external evaluation standards, would certainly be more conducive to the development of young writers than traditional evaluation structures.

Societal Pressures

The teacher-writers also spoke briefly about some of the conditions and attitudes in society which inhibit student success in writing. Garry mentioned pressures on students to work while they attend school; some students must work to help support parents, while others are encouraged to work in order to save money for post-secondary education. As well, parents put pressure on their children to achieve high grades and so does the public, particularly after having access to the diploma exam results of individual schools. Garry says that his students tell him their primary worry is the amount of stress they must cope with. Marian notes that this stress has increased since jobs are more scarce and consequently, competition for marks is even more fierce. Many universities are raising grade point averages for entry into certain programs. Students know that the combined message is: fight for every mark you can get. And that is precisely what they do.

My concern is that rather than questioning the result of the multiple pressures burdening our young people, society blindly continues to push them into political and cultural traps they will likely remain in, even as adults. When discussing the pressures created by Diploma Exams, Garry

notes that "It seems to be a by-product of today's politics that we should not question the Diploma Exams or the politics of Alberta. We're not in the business of questioning, we're in the business of passing the test." As schools increasingly resemble businesses, a reflective, questioning culture is endangered. Without this culture, our students will remain emotionally and psychologically at risk.

High School Structures

Janeen and Glen expressed some concern over students taking English courses over the short time frame of a few months, rather than having the opportunity to take a year-long course. Glen says students generally write less in semestered courses. In McNeill's study (1990), a high school teacher similarly notes that more can be accomplished in a full year, and also believes that students tend to mature over a year as opposed to a semester. Janeen says semesters make it difficult for students to become independent writers who no longer need to rely on revising and editing checklists or questions. She believes goal setting, a skill that takes time to develop, is also difficult for students to do well in such a brief time frame. Janeen and Marian talk about the challenge of developing a sense of community in semestered courses despite activities in small groups or pairs; Janeen notes that, ocassionally, by the end of the course, some students still do not know the names of others in the same class.

Colleagues have told me they prefer semestered courses because they see fewer students on a daily basis; perhaps reducing class sizes would encourage more teachers to demand non-semestered courses. If we truly believe non-semestered courses benefit students in many ways, we need to voice our concerns to administrators and begin exploring avenues that enhance the well-being and growth of both teachers and students.

Marian challenges the traditional conception of how high school timetables are structured by saying that we need to look at models which are conducive to student choice. In her present junior high classroom, she spends four hours every day with the same students, who work at their own pace on the four core subjects. She believes that they can be

taught to be more independent when they are given a large time frame with which to work on the activity of their choice. Marian observes that since high school classes are often an hour in length, both teachers and students constantly having to make transitions into different activities and frames of mind. When students have more time, they learn to become involved in their work, not looking at the clock every few minutes to see when the bell rings for dismissal. Marian also believes seeing the same students for hours at a time every day helps strengthen relationships pivotal to building community between students and between teachers and students. Such benefits, she believes, are far more important than the convenience a semestered system or hour long classes might bring.

Marian also believes, from experience, that teachers who work with one group of students rather than four or five groups do not spend every evening and weekend reading compositions, as is often the case with full-time high school English teachers. She notes that life is now more enjoyable for her as she has more opportunity to spend necessary time away from school obligations. I believe this space results in teachers having more energy to commit to students during school hours. Many times, I remember feeling hesitant about conversing with students on a Monday morning after reading their work until midnight on a Sunday, a day of rest. Because I enjoy teaching high school students, however, I want to help find ways and gather support for re-visioning traditional high school structures.

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The teacher writers' comments inspire me to think about how we can work toward a better environment for both teachers and students. Marian notes that it is more comfortable to simply keep conditions the same:

> So many things that happen in high schools and schools in general are driven by things other than what's good for kids because to do things differently is a hassle.... It requires thinking creatively and thinking differently by both teachers and students about how the day is structured, about how

things work.

Marian believes complacency ought not become a habit in the lives of teachers and their students. Rief (1992) agrees, saying, "As teachers I think we have to fight for what we believe is good teaching, and the conditions under which good teaching can happen" (p. 131). She echoes the voices of the teacher-writers as she says, "I will continue to take a stand: on testing, on class size, on good teaching practices" (p. 131).

While many teachers do create positive environments for students under existing conditions, they also need to dispute those external conditions which cause teachers and students to suffer. Bomer (1995) believes such action can be positive in that it confirms beliefs about good teaching practice. When teachers have strong beliefs and convictions, they can collectively begin to look for solutions and dissolve barriers. While resistance is never comfortable, it is more rewarding than joining the silenced, the sleeping, on a road with no horizon.

Chapter 6: Reflections on Research Findings

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time

T.S. Eliot

I took my first step as a researcher the day I began to teach. By nature a reflective person, I wrote in journals and pondered my past and future teaching practices, searching for ways to help students succeed. Several years later, as a full-time graduate student, I had the opportunity to extend my research into the classrooms of others to discover their own teaching practices. Since I was interested in learning more about students' and published authors' writing processes, this study evolved into an examination of how teacher-writers approach the teaching of writing in high schools. Although I discovered much about the way in which my participants teach writing, I found that my most significant findings had little to do with specific student activities or teaching ideas and more to do with a natural approach to teaching writing: participants exist as writers in their classroom and create a writing community by providing an environment for students which parallels professional writers'. Students are treated as writers; consequently, their environment contains few artificial conditions which act as impediments to their growth.

Because my case studies are limited and represent the ideas of a few participants, I do not presume that their voices represent all teacher-writers. However, since their practices and philosophies of teaching writing are strikingly similar, and because I myself am a teacher-writer, I decided in this chapter to illustrate how their voices may influence my future teaching of high school student-writers. In doing this, I invite teachers and researchers to take their own journey of reflection, to see possibilities for their own teaching of writing.

Students as Writers

The teacher-writers exist as writers in their classroom and allow students to do the same. In creating an environment conducive to students' growth as writers, the teacher-writers all advocate providing them with choices and decisions to make about their writing. The teacher-writers believe that students begin thinking of themselves as writers when they make their own decisions about writing processes, topics, stylistic techniques, and revisions. As writers, they are engaged in making countless decisions about their writing and share these decisions with students. While they encourage students to try using a method or process that has worked for other writers and themselves, they also provide opportunities for students to make their own decisions about what works best for them.

In emulating a writer's world of choices, the teachers also provide time for writers to work on individual processes and give them opportunities to abandon drafts and revise ones that are most promising. The physical writing environment is also conducive to individual choice as students have access to computers, space for quiet writing, and tables or groups of desks for peer conversations.

In my own classroom, I would like to explore a writing workshop structure which allows students to exist as writers in the classroom. Like Marian, I could devote two of six blocks to a workshop setting in which students develop writing folders and portfolios. During this time, they could work on different pieces and processes, receiving feedback when needed. Like the teacher-writers, I would like to have young writers experience the intensity of a genre study that examines techniques and uses student and professional pieces as models to illustrate possibilities of writing in a particular genre and form. However, I am also interested in letting students discover form once they engage in some preliminary writing. Some writers and other artists believe this to be a more natural process in creating any artwork, since the limitations of form do not immediately influence content.

I believe in the value of integrating reading and writing as much as possible, and like Rief (1990), I will invite students to use a readers'-writers' log where they can make natural connections between literature

and their own writing. However, I am wary about students not separating response to literature from a workshop setting because (as was my tendency in previous years of teaching high school) I emphasized this response at the expense of other types of writing. I once thought students had sufficient opportunities to create fiction and personal pieces by responding to a piece of literature "creatively." Kill two birds with one stone. The teacher-writers have helped me realize that students need to express themselves in many ways, to create solely from their own thoughts, feeling, memories, experiences. It is too easy to shape high school English language arts into a series of literature courses which use journals, essays and even "creative" responses, rather than allowing the content of the courses to validate diverse writing done apart from literature.

The teacher-writers often allow students to write in a genre of their choice when completing writing folders. I think in my own workshop, students could have the same opportunity. Initially, I thought about waiting until we had, as a class, discussed many genres before allowing individual students to experiment. I now see, however, that I was assuming students could not write unless I revealed certain information I deemed to be valuable. I want to spend time during the workshop blocks talking individually with students about certain genre techniques they would like to use. Like Bomer (1995), I could create files that contain models and ideas for working with specific genres and forms. These files would stay in the classroom and students could read their contents during workshop time or could ask for copies to take home. By doing this, they would likely rely less on the teacher for "answers" and more on themselves for seeking and finding resources when needed.

A Writing Community

A community of writers exists in each of the teacher-writers' classrooms because the teacher is not seen as someone who is isolated from the process students participate in daily as they write. The teachers all write with their students and share their drafts and polished pieces. Because they participate as members of a writing community, students respect and value the conversations with them. Relationships are

strengthened as there is a mutual understanding of the hard work that writing is. Because the teacher-writers have experienced frustrations in developing certain pieces and have felt the sting of harsh feedback to their writing, they tend to respond to their student-writers with compassion and sensitivity. They emphasize strong aspects of writing in oral and written form. When engaged is such response, they naturally provide models of feedback which results in students respecting the drafts or polished products of their peers and teachers.

As I begin working at another high school, I am anxious to create a community such as the ones I observed and heard about. Participating in a writing workshop for women this summer reminded me again of how important it is that individuals have the opportunity to create and share their creations together as a group. There is a tacit knowledge, a sense of understanding of ourselves and the world that, when expressed through language, creates bonds between strangers. As a teacher, I want my students to see me as part of the link that connects them as a group of writers.

Since my whole being, intellectually and emotionally, is immersed in the research and writing of this thesis, my awareness of responding sensitively to the writing of others has heightened dramatically. When children or young adults put a part of themselves into any piece they write, they are vulnerable, perhaps even more than adults are. Writing daily, as I have for over the past few months, reinforces my desire to help students build their own pieces around strengths rather than always dwelling on weakness. In the writing workshop I attended this summer, people responded positively to specific elements of writing read aloud. When sharing my own pieces, I received positive responses to certain images and phrases, which helped me advance my writing by developing more of the same types of language and techniques. I felt confident that I could build on my strengths, but I am not sure that this would have been the case had I received feedback that consisted only of suggestions for improvement. For me, this experience combined with the voices of the teacher-writers has swayed my thinking about responding to my own students' writing. I would now like to try using Garry's methods of response: comment only on the strengths of a piece unless students specifically ask for suggestions or constructive criticism. In this way, I

can assist students not only with their self-esteem and skills as writers, but also by creating more opportunity for independence, responsibility and decision-making.

Discovering Thought

Because the teachers in this study write consistently in different genres for different purposes, they experience the joy of discovering an idea, image, and characters who take on a life of their own and begin to dictate the events of a story. In fact, the teacher-writers savour the element of surprise in writing, noting that it is one of the great joys of creating. In being receptive to discovery, they are aware of the necessity for periods of incubation, and provide time for this process in their own classrooms. Tools such as writing folders and portfolios are seen as useful in that they allow students sufficient time to incubate ideas for the development of one piece while working on another.

Illumination, or the point at which the teacher-writers have discovered an idea or solution to a problem, occurs when they have some quiet time alone or when they are doing activities that require little concentration, allowing the subconscious to reveal itself. They share these "secrets" with students who are not exposed to such discovery processes in textbooks. It seems as though writing to know is devalued in current curriculum resources, whereas writing to prove what you know is honoured. Authors write to discover themselves and the world around them; students need the same opportunities.

I would like to talk to students about the "mysteries" of writing to discover and allow them to experience writing for surprise, writing to know. If my students work on a writing folder over a period of several weeks, they can use incubation as a tool to discover. In a writer's workshop, they could decide if and when they need distance from their writing in order to experience illumination. As a teacher, I can share my insights about my own needs for incubation and illustrate procrastination as an entirely different and destructive process. By doing a "status of the class" (Atwell, 1987) check, I can encourage students to move away from procrastination and toward incubation, since I can keep track of what they are working on and how much time they use to complete it. Perhaps

students could keep reflective notes on their writing processes, which would help them assess whether they are crossing the tenuous line between incubation and procrastination. Such information would also assist my understanding of individual writers and how I might help them continue to grow.

The teacher-writers contributed to my realization that discovering ideas for writing, or as Cameron (1992) says, "filling the well" (p. 21), can be relatively effortless if a writer observes, records and reflects. The habit of being aware of the environment around them helps the teacher-writers fill their notebooks with ideas which are used immediately or after a few days or weeks. Thinking about being receptive to ideas, rather than actively searching them out, is a process I have experienced as a writer, but I never brought my own notebooks into the classroom. I avoided discussing the awareness I had as a writer as I wasn't sure that it constituted "important" learning. Now I recognize that being observant and aware, whether or not notebooks are used, can be a life-long goal for students and teachers. Professional writers need to be aware in order to show others a version of truth. Students too could be more alive to the world if we helped them see it with the fresh eyes of a child. I'd like to model this writerly quality and invite students to share every day, orally or in writing, their own observations and reflections that intrigue them enough to record or share an image, conversation, event, or story.

While most of the teacher-writers keep notebooks, they have not asked students to do the same. Instead, they invite them to develop a writer's awareness through descriptions and reflections of memory and recent experiences, as well as through questions about objects and issues both familiar and strange. By tapping into what students care about, the teacher-writers help them see writing as a vehicle for expression, a way of voicing who they are and how they see the world around them. Hopefully, they will become increasingly observant and reflective as they are invited to create using their senses and experience.

Occasionally the internal censor in writers stops them from recording anything of a personal nature, sometimes due to the pain it causes and at other times due to fear of judgement by others. The teacher-writers help students tap into their unconscious through freewriting and clustering. By writing continuously under a limited time

frame, writers' words, as Garry says, spill onto the page, and the censor sponge has no time to soak up thoughts. Student-writers may express genuine emotion and reveal values and thoughts they never knew they had. Clustering also helps writers break away from fears of having to begin a piece with the writing of complete sentences, since it encourages spontaneous connections between words and phrases derived from a single word prompt. As Rico (1983) explains, the absence of the order and structure of the left-brain hemisphere required to write a sentence frees the right-brain hemisphere to explore and experiment with ideas. By creating a cluster in a short time frame, students can, as in freewriting, be more successful in recording spontaneous thought from the unconscious.

A couple of the teacher-writers ask students to try clustering and then using a word or idea from this exercise as a prompt for freewriting. This works well since students are attracted to a particular word or idea for reasons they may not even be aware of. After creating the prompt used to freewrite, students may find that their writing leads to an important discovery about themselves or the way they see the world. When they witness the power of writing to discover, they will likely continue using methods like clustering and freewriting to help initiate or sustain their creations in progress.

While freewriting and clustering are certainly not new strategies for teachers of writing, I believe they are used less as writers get older and are expected to do more and more writing to prove their knowledge -- writing such as literary critical essays, research papers, and responses to literature. I had forgotten the power of freewriting and clustering to open dams and let the waters of the unconscious reveal truths. When this happens, polished writing is not the result, but raw feeling and thought is, and from these seeds of truth revised drafts can indeed result in a product that has the ability to move audiences who recognize the experience and emotion that connect one human being to another.

The poem "Little Yellow Marigold," used in the second chapter of this study, was a result of quick clustering; I found the transition from this exercise to the first draft of the poem to be almost effortless. Thoughts stemming from the cluster were quickly recorded in the poem, which later required revision, but the basic ideas and many of the words

remained the same. Similarly, I experienced the results of several freewriting prompts in a workshop I recently attended; I listened to the raw power of words that echoed with beauty and truth. In my own writing, I never expected to create such powerful images and phrases in twenty minute time frames. My own testimony will serve as a catalyst to my teaching practice as I invite students to join me in both gentle and shocking surprise as we allow the flow of our thoughts to create streams of story.

Perhaps freewriting and clustering will cause some pain and discomfort in students, but I strongly believe that such feeling indicates that they have reached a point where they are truly themselves, a point where masks are destroyed, at least during the brief time of creation. In a workshop I attended, most of the writers began to cry after a few days, as they allowed themselves to write what they felt and cared most deeply about. I'm not sure that our students will ever give themselves permission to cry when writing or reading their creations, but if they experience freewriting and clustering enough, they will eventually find themselves exploring uncomfortable territory, facing what they can no longer hide from. While some teachers may not want students to participate in such writing because it is viewed as too personal, we need to examine where the seeds of honest, powerful writing originate. I have read too many bland, lifeless, thoughtless pieces in my career to be afraid of "personal" writing.

I'd like to share a piece of my own writing, written in the last few minutes of a twenty minute freewriting exercise. I believe it illustrates well my thoughts on the power of "personal" writing.

I never knew tears could be the entry point of an awakening. Natalie Goldberg's words are in my gut, saying we need to wake up after a long, long sleep. It feels good to greet this day with words, with the passion and conviction and intellect of tears. Tears are a way of knowing, coming to know self. The stream of wells dug deep, full of stale and fresh water.

Yesterday a friend read a quotation from a book I gave her as a going-away gift. It said something like, "To live well, we only need the salt water of sweat, tears and the ocean." My friend likes the fact that I

love her tears. We know intuitively that tears are the streams that are the oceans that ripple and move forward and back and forward in time, always always now, being in the moment, now. Can you hear them? Tears flow in silence over the stone stories that teach us to talk.

Sharing, Listening, Conversing, Reflecting

After students have some writing on paper, the teacher-writers help them respond to it by giving them opportunities to share it with them or with peers, who listen carefully and later converse with the writer. They also help students view writing from a distance by describing how it affects them as readers. Because writers have to make the ultimate decisions about what their polished product will look like, however, the students also develop processes of reflection and assessment of their own writing.

All of the teacher-writers talk about conversing individually with students who are engaged in diverse writing processes. They believe that such conversation strengthens student-teacher relationships, results in students seeing themselves as writers, and provides models for students giving feedback to peers and themselves. Some of the teacher-writers also help students respond to peers by providing specific criteria for a piece or a collection of writing. These criteria act as a scaffold until students are confident and have sufficient skills to respond to the writing of others as well as their own.

Three of the teacher-writers belong to writing groups, and the experience of participating in group feedback has influenced their own oral response to student writing and some of the methods their students use in responding. They talk about an emphasis on positive response and the ability to make specific suggestions or ask questions which help the writer evaluate the piece and make decisions. Janeen and Marian also have had student-writers simply listen to their group come to an understanding of the piece instead of trying to explain or defend the writing. This act of listening makes writers aware of how others think and feel while reading their piece. Glen encourages student-writers to ask questions in order to get specific feedback from their group. Both

methods invite students to take responsibility for their own writing and to see the value of peer response.

By incorporating blocks of time for a writer's workshop, I hope to have more opportunity to talk as a writer with student-writers and to learn to listen and help them listen to conversations about their work. Sometimes students need an immediate response concerning a problem with their writing, and a workshop setting would allow for these needs to be met. I hope to refine my methods of response by listening carefully to student texts and by telling students how their writing made me feel and what thoughts and questions came to mind, rather than always focusing on criteria While I agree with the teacher-writers that criteria are useful for student-writers who need and want to know what aspect of their writing to work toward and develop, they sometimes lead me to abandon my spontaneous response as a reader in favour of my "teacher" response. Students receive much teacher response in teacher language, but I believe they need to see the wonder, emotion, confusion and interior thoughts of readers in order to fully understand the power words have over readers and audiences.

When listening to the descriptions of how the participants' own writing groups function, I began thinking about how my women's writing group tends to give and receive feedback and how our meetings might affect the way that I structure peer response in my classroom. We decided as a group to meet every two weeks, but we had no agenda, no rules for responding. As we continued to meet, I noticed we began asking questions as writers after listening to feedback, but we also extended the conversations into our lives as readers, teachers, mothers, daughters. We suggested books that would help a particular writer in her thinking on a topic, and related experiences that paralleled her own to illustrate how we had come to connect with the piece. The purpose of reading is not just to inform; it is to take us back into familiar experience, inviting reflection and, consequently, growth as human beings. This natural dialogue which moves beyond a set of defined rules is what I would like to promote in my own classroom as students share their writing. While I am not yet sure how this might happen, I know that such conversation is vital if students are to become life-long writers, readers and learners. I believe more and more that fragmentation causes

artificial circumstances which stunt learning of any kind. My goal is to move students beyond fragments into the whole, where connections between writing, reading and the personal and larger world can be continually made.

In responding to their own writing, the teacher-writers talk about audience awareness, particularly as a draft nears completion. With certain genres like poetry, they view the audience as quite broad; as a result, they do not attend closely to it. In writing an article for a magazine, however, they are very aware of the specific audience which expects certain styles and conventions to be used. They share this information with their students and note that most often, students are more focused in their writing when having a specific audience in mind.

Often, the audience for students is their peers. The teacher-writers talk about their students sharing their writing with a partner, small groups or the whole class. Reading aloud helps the writers gain experience with a real audience responding to their piece of writing, and helps them gain a different perspective as they listen and watch for spontaneous verbal and non-verbal clues that indicate whether parts of their writing work or not.

I too would like to see my students access their peer audience and be aware of genre as they contemplate when and to what extent to attend to audience concerns. Students need a variety of real audiences who can respond to their writing -- audiences outside the classroom walls. For instance, students could write letters and editorials to school newspapers and teen magazines. They could write children's stories and poems which they could illustrate and read to a group of elementary students. If students are given such opportunities, they may view writing as a way to express themselves, communicate with others, and provide entertainment. Writers write for all of these reasons and more, but they rarely write to prove their worth to an audience of one.

The teacher-writers are also aware of voice when reading and listening to their own writing and their students' writing. They help young writers understand it by illustrating and praising instances when it occurs. Some of the teachers dialogue with students or have them read their writing into a tape-recorder to help them hear where their voice resounds and when it disappears in a flurry of confusing sentences and

garbled phrases. Some also note that students have certain ideas about writing which lead them to compose in ways they believe are admired by teachers. A young writer, wanting to sound "intelligent," loses her voice in trying to take herself out of her compositions, replacing it with the distant and bland third person, a vague entity.

Marian talks about having students begin a course by writing in a form that celebrates personal expression: autobiography. This form, she says, encourages voice that appears to be in your living room, talking to you. When students feel confident with their own voice, it is easier for them to make a transition into forms with conventions that limit declarations of self, personal beliefs or values.

I hope to help students maintain or re-discover their voice or voices in writing. If they are exposed to various genres and forms, voice is more likely to reveal itself than if they focus only on response to literature. Models of voice in student writing need to be shared and discussed. As a student, I was unaware of the concept of voice, and as I entered university, I forgot what writing with conviction and passion was like. I forgot the sound of my own voice. I want students to leave high school with an awareness and confidence in their writing voice, allowing it to change over time, but remembering not to abandon that element that gives their writing, as Garry says, their personal fingerprints.

According to the teacher-writers, one of the last stages in the development of their own pieces is to publish them. They talk about the pleasures of publishing their work, both in written and oral form. They remind me that oral publishing is important because it gives writers a live audience, which helps them assess their own strengths and whether they achieved a desired effect. Also, for people who enjoy the sound of language as well as the meaning, listening to a reading is another avenue for reflection and entertainment.

The teacher-writers' students tend to share their polished work as a celebration of their achievement and as a confirmation of the importance of sharing words with others. They also are involved in written methods of publishing that all students can participate in, such as class and individual anthologies, school newspapers and year-books. For those who wish to publish their work elsewhere, the teacher-writers display writing contests and magazines that accept young writers' work.

Just as I want to provide my students with a variety of real audiences, so too am I working toward giving them more opportunities to publish in oral and written form, both in and out of the school environment. I'd like students to read their work to such audiences as young children and the elderly or disabled; people who may not be able to attend literature evenings would appreciate having young writers share their words. As well, I want to explore the making of class anthologies which could be distributed to the public, not just students and their parents. Bookstores or local newspapers could sponsor a school anthology which could be widely distributed. I need to take more time to re-vision publishing so that students can take pride in their writing and know the power their words can have over others.

In preparing for publication, the teacher-writers all edit their work and have others edit for them to ensure the piece is grammatically and mechanically flawless. However, they all focus on content when writing or responding to a first draft. They warn that students can ignore or struggle with what they are trying to say if overly concerned about surface conventions. When the young writers want to polish a piece of writing, the teachers help them individually with editing, reminding them of group mini-lessons on certain conventions, or introducing a rule which they are unfamiliar with. However, this individual assistance usually occurs only when requested, so that the motivation and responsibility to improve a piece comes from the writer, not the teacher. When students request editing assistance, the teachers are careful to use a method which respects the property of the writers and ask peer editors to do the same; both teachers and students use methods such as checkmarks in margins or numbers which correspond to a certain type of error, rather than crossing out the writer's words and inserting their own text.

In my own experience teaching high school, students tend to be obsessed with surface conventions, yet repeat the same errors. I would like to converse with individuals rather than a large group because students often have difficulty applying conventions to their own writing. Perhaps after teaching a mini-lesson to a group, I could make anecdotal records, like Marian does, to be aware of who is having problems, and then spend time with these students while they are polishing a piece. Individual assistance also helps me as a teacher understand how my

students process information and how I can better help them apply it to their own writing. Like the teacher-writers, I have always respected the integrity of a piece when editing, but perhaps I need to ask students what method of editing they prefer and why, just as Glen and Marian do. When I begin giving students more choice and decisions, they will hopefully become increasingly independent and see themselves as writers.

The teacher-writers emphasize that effective writing results from the ability to assess a piece, re-visioning and revising it until it meets or partially meets the writer's expectations. They note that the feedback from their writers' groups, incubation or distance from the process and product, and attention to specific techniques help them view their writing as a reader. As teachers, they encourage students to use these same methods, but because young writers have difficulty knowing specifically how to improve their writing, most of the teacher-writers provide specific criteria which focuses peer feedback and the writers' own assessment of the piece. By scaffolding the experience of assessment, they hope that students graduating from high school will be able to assess their writing in any genre or form and use this skill to improve their compositions.

The teacher-writers involve students in the self-assessment of writing folders and portfolios as well. This long term assessment helps students become reflective about their own writing processes, products and overall growth as writers and allows a teacher to gain valuable information about how individual writers work and how they view their products and themselves as writers.

I want to involve my students in more long term assessment as well as assessment of the process and product of individual pieces. By reflecting on how their writing has or has not changed, students have a sense of themselves as writers and are more aware of areas of need they can work on and strengths they can enhance over several weeks, months or years. Like the teacher-writers, I would like my students to know that it is natural and beneficial to have others respond to their writing, but that they must ultimately make final assessments and any revisions.

Resisting Impediments to Student-Writers' Growth

While the teacher-writers enjoy teaching writing in high school and provide constant opportunity for students to develop their writing, they do experience some frustration with external constraints on their students' growth as writers. Although they do resist the pressure to conform and remain complacent, they talk about the influence of such pressure on many teachers and students.

The Provincial English Diploma Exams are viewed as an impediment to students' development as writers. The teacher-writers all expressed concern over the narrow representation of genres and forms in the written portion of the exam, which often results in students who are asked to write only essays, and more specifically, literary critical essays. They also note that the exam emphasizes product, whereas, in their own classrooms, much time is spent on process activities like peer conversations, revision and discovery writing; consequently the assessment is not authentic, representing a small portion of what students do throughout the year as writers. Garry notes that the exam is extremely expensive to create, administer and mark; he believes the money could be better spent in other education endeavours that actually help children learn.

While I recognize the value in helping students learn the techniques writers use in specific forms and genres, like Marian, I believe that the skills necessary to write literary critical essays can be developed without focusing on the form. Despite the fact that the exam is "worth" fifty percent of final grades in English 30 and 33 (25% writing, 25% multiple choice reading), I will continue to give young writers the experience of choosing their own topics and writing in diverse genres and forms. I will continue to allow them to exist as writers in my classroom, because I believe confident, independent writers who can assess their own compositions will write well in any form. When we begin to doubt our students' abilities as writers, as I once did, we cause them to rely on "the expert," giving them more practice at things they may not be ready for and consequently dislike doing. As Marian says, we need to trust that providing students with opportunities to succeed will later allow them to do well with more foreign or challenging kinds of writing.

Some of the teachers note that they would adapt the exam if given the choice, mentioning the inclusion of personal, persuasive or imaginative writing. Two of the teacher-writers question the existence of such exams. I agree. As Janeen says, the exam does not teach students to love writing. Instead, it causes them to doubt their own voice and skills, starving their internal motivation to create as it feeds on their anxiety and doubt about themselves as writers. Unfortunately, many people believe the results of the exam prove whether or not students are good writers. This perception places stress on teachers, who are sometimes blamed for results the public views as disappointing. Exams cause a vicious cycle where teachers and students are compromised as writers, learners, human beings. The welfare of educators and their students depends on voices that resist such impediments, voices that, collectively, can result in positive change.

Several other constraints concern the teacher-writers, one being lack of time. They feel that high school teachers are pressured to prepare students for the diploma exams while trying to meet the demands of a swelling curriculum. Because of increasing class sizes, teachers have less time to converse individually with students and find that reading drafts of over one hundred and twenty students consumes most of their after-school hours. Because of this, it becomes difficult to find the time, the mental space, to work on their own writing. Students too share the same difficulty as they have jobs and other obligations after school, yet find it difficult at times to be productive in class. Semestered classes ensure that both students and teachers feel the constraints even more. Society, unfortunately, honours the "busy beaver," believing that constant work leads to great achievement. It does not, by and large, value the inner stillness often needed to create something of value to the writer and reader.

I would like to use some of the strategies the teacher-writers use to lessen the negative impact of the way in which schools and society think of and use time. They insist on providing quiet time for students to write and use class time to read some drafts. By having students note which selections of writing they would like a response to or an evaluation of, they avoid reading and responding to everything the students write. The teachers respond orally to much of the writing, which they view as more

beneficial than written response in that it is immediate and saves teachers time writing long, detailed comments. Some of the teacher-writers do set certain times for their own writing, while others write when they have a quiet moment alone. They talk to students about their need for a peaceful, silent environment in order to write, although they recognize that not every student thrives in a similar atmosphere while writing.

Being away from school environments this year, I have certainly come to value serene activities like watching a sunset, going for long walks and simply doing nothing. I've learned that doing nothing is indeed something: it helps me write when I'm ready to write; it relaxes my mind and body, and, on the best days, it beckons my muse. While I cannot force students to provide time for themselves, perhaps my talking and writing about it will give some of them permission to be alone with their thoughts.

A couple of the teacher-writers express some concern over the effects of grading on students. They note that motivation to write becomes largely external, and the atmosphere in classrooms can become competitive rather than cooperative. Students are unwilling to take risks and end up creating bland, lifeless pieces. Teachers want to work with students who are at different skill levels, yet are forced to give them a grade based on a particular standard. Almost always, grades cause anxiety which works against the development of students as writers, since they are more concerned with a number than they are with becoming confident, skilled writers. Society reinforces the importance of numbers. Parents, universities, colleges, and employers use them to judge a student's worth. Not surprisingly, the teacher-writers encounter resistance when they do not give grades for every assignment; students are so comfortable playing the grading game that they no longer feel secure when a teacher merely responds with words. However, some of the teacher-writers continue to ask students to submit writing folders and portfolios, providing a single grade which is often decided upon by both the writer and teacher. If student writing must be graded, perhaps involving students in the process is one way to partially alleviate its destructive effects.

I would like my students to participate in the assessment and grading of their writing. While self-grading calls attention to external

motivation, it is perhaps a solution until society can re-vision the evaluation of products in another form. Personally, I would like to see portfolios replace grades, but few schools have gone this route as tradition and simple, cost-effective methods remain entrenched in schools. If portfolios are not an option at the schools I teach at, I do believe good teaching practice and an environment that emulates that of a professional writer will help students be more inclined to write for reasons other than grades.

Certain teaching practices do continue to help students thrive as writers and learners, and many English language arts teachers are remarkable in their ability to subdue the effects of constraint on students -- so remarkable, in fact, that the public accepts, even welcomes decreasing funds to education, increasing class sizes, and external exams. I believe the strengths of teachers should not be an excuse for the abominable conditions they and their students continue to face. We, as educators, must speak against such constraints and not assume that we cannot institute change. For the sake of teachers and students, we must collectively voice our concerns.

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Despite the challenges that face English teachers today, the joy of creating an environment for students that parallels that of writers continues to sustain the teacher-writers in this study. They find pleasure in conversing as writers with students, and because they treat their students as writers, a sense of community develops. It is the creation of community that I too want to encourage in my own classroom, mainly by existing as a writer and by inviting students to do the same. As a writer, I want to celebrate process and products with my classroom community, and I encourage other teachers to consider similar actions.

Although the teacher-writers are not sure to what extent their role as writers affects their teaching of writing, I perceived the connection to be evident in almost every response they gave while being interviewed. Because they participate in the process of writing and revel in sharing their products with an audience, they know first-hand the relevance of creating an atmosphere and conditions which are natural to the growth of

young writers. It is by providing such conditions that they influence students' attitudes toward writing, inviting them to become life-long writers. I invite teachers to become life-long writers too, both in and out of the classroom. No recipes. No answers. Just a way of being.

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